CHUMS

MARIA LOUISE POOL

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CHUMS

Works of

Maria Louise Pool

In a Dike Shanty

Boss and Other Dogs

Chums

Little Bermuda

L. C. PAGE AND COMPANY

(Incorporated)

212 Summer St., Boston, Mass.

"JULIA DID HER WORK."

(*See page 83.*)

CHUMS

BY

MARIA LOUISE POOL

AUTHOR OF

"DALLY," "A REDBRIDGE NEIGHBOURHOOD," "IN A DIKE SHANTY," "FRIENDSHIP AND FOLLY," "LITTLE BERMUDA," ETC.

Illustrated by

L. J. BRIDGMAN

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Setting the River on Fire	11
II.	What There Was in the Boat	20
III.	Back at the Institute	33
IV.	The Fate of the Roses	40
V.	Mercy in Disgrace	50
VI.	Hunting for the Fugitive	60
VII.	In the Algebra Class	70
VIII.	Queen Mary's Marys	78
IX.	"It can never Be Proved"	91
X.	Delivering the Letter	109
XI.	A Surprise	122
XII.	Bayside Trots	143
XIII.	What Came of Fishing	160
XIV.	Heartsease's Temper	170
XV.	An Omelet with Fine Herbs	177
XVI.	Heartsease Missing Still	190
XVII.	Low Blues	200
XVIII.	A Present	209
XIX.	A Dry Time	223
XX.	The Last	229

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

PAGE

"JULIA DID HER WORK" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"MERCY STOOPED AND LIFTED THE DWARF IN HER ARMS" 30

"MERCY CLAMBERED FROM IT ON HIS BACK" . . 125

"'YOU DON'T GIVE US THE SLIP, YOUNG MAN'" . 181

CHUMS.

CHAPTER I.

SETTING THE RIVER ON FIRE.

MERCY ANTHONY suddenly flung open the door of the room across the hall from her own "den" in the "Holden Mountain Institute for Young Ladies."

She was black of eyes and scarlet of dress, and altogether picturesque in her boating costume.

"Poor thing!" she cried out. "Leave your quadratic equations and your unknown quantities, and come, oh, come with me! The river waits below. So do the girls."

The girl addressed lifted her head from her two hands, revealing a flushed face, and answered in a deep voice, a voice so deep, in fact,

that it was irresistibly ludicrous, and had been the cause of somebody's calling Delight Chantry "the Trombone." Of course the name stuck fast, and the girl accepted it as gracefully as she could.

Delight looked at her neglected equations remorsefully. She said if she went now she would have to do them after the "glims were doused, which would necessitate a 'smuggler,' and a smuggler made her feel awful wicked."

Her friend begged her not to go and have conscientious scruples, as conscientious scruples were enough to sink the best boat ever built.

The two girls hurried down the long hall which ran between the rooms in this wing, then out on a side piazza overlooking the valley at the base of the Holden Mountain. In this valley, a quarter of a mile away, ran the Holden River, where were numerous boats secured to the tree-shaded shore. On this evening of each week anybody could try her hand at the oars, and an instructor in rowing was present. Rather of a gala night it was, and as they hastened down the path the two

caught glimpses of the Chinese lanterns that were hung among the trees.

Half a dozen girls stood around the boat-house as Mercy and Delight came down the path. Their gay flannel dresses and knicker-bockers made a pretty picture, and their chatter was like the chatter of nothing in the world save girls. Our two friends meant business, however, so they shouldered their oars, and marched silently down to the bank. Here a tall girl was just pushing off. She told Mercy eagerly that she would bet almost anything that she, Kate McDonald, could get beyond the last stake up by the gas-works first.

"Almost anything means nothing," replied Mercy. "Do be a little more definite."

"My next cake from home, then," responded Kate.

"Done!" was the answering shout. The next moment four more boats had shoved out and entered the race. Delight and Mercy, in their craft, were putting forth all their skill, and were in advance.

It was a mild night in June. The air was

sweet, the river calm, and the gay voices, the splash of water, the snatches of song, the lights hung here and there, explained why the boating season was so eagerly longed for.

Mercy suddenly paused in her stroke, and the boat swept out of its course.

"What is that ahead of us? There! Don't you see something white?" she asked. "What is it? If I know anything about a ghost I should say that is one. I'm going to turn back."

"No, no!" cried Delight, peering forward. Her eyes were longer-sighted than those of her companion. "It's a child, I think. But what child could be out on the river alone this evening? And the boat is going like lightning. Oh, I could almost say it is a sprite. How do sprites look?"

There was something very weird in the sight of the white object, dimly visible, gliding over the dark water.

The two girls were now at the very limits of the space where they were allowed to row. The last Chinese lantern was some rods behind them. Before, on the banks of the

river, there rose blackly the building of the gas-works which supplied the town of Holden.

The girls were forbidden to go more than a few yards beyond the last lantern, and already this boat hovered just over the boundary. Neither of these two often broke rules. Though wild and spirited they had a sense of honour.

"We must go back," said Delight.

"But I can't go. I must find out about that," was the excited response.

"Oh! Oh!"

There was fear mingled with the surprise with which this exclamation broke from their lips. Something had happened in front of them.

The white figure in advance had ceased its gliding motion and apparently had lighted a match, for the small flame glowed for an instant over the tiny being which sat in a wee shallop. The flame revealed a face no larger than that of a child. But was it the face of a child?

From the movement the figure had seemed at first to be looking at a watch. Then the

lighted taper was suddenly flung over the side of the boat, and instantly the whole river was in a blaze.

The two girls sat motionless, their wild eyes and colourless faces turned toward the strange scene. The flames leaped and ran. The little white form in the midst of them had thrown up its arms, uttered a sharp cry of terror and then fallen forward in the bottom of the boat where nothing could be seen of it but a portion of its drapery, whether of skirt or coat could not be distinguished.

"Row! For heaven's sake, row!" cried Delight, as the flames seemed coming toward them, licking across the top of the water.

"But what will become of that creature?" was Mercy's question.

She was so bewildered that she could think of nothing coherently. In the next moment she said:

"The flames are not coming here. Don't you see that they are dying away ahead of us? Do you think that is a human being? I'd give everything in the world if I were safe in my room! Oh, Delight, don't you think we

ought to try to do something to help that little imp out there? I wonder why he isn't dressed in a tight suit of red, with cloven feet and a tail. He must be an imp or he never could have set this water to blazing like that. You know very well we couldn't have done it. We can't set the river on fire."

Mercy's voice ran on excitedly; she hardly knew what she was saying. The fire was indeed not coming toward them, but it was blazing rapidly across the river nearer to the gas-works, curling along like some mysterious live thing.

The being in the little boat had not moved. There it still lay, a white fold of its dress falling in the water; and now Delight pointed to an oar which was floating on the water beyond reach of the occupant of the boat.

"We must do something to help," said Delight. "If you would only stop talking for a minute, Mercy, perhaps we might be able to think to some purpose. I never heard a tongue go on like yours."

"It's such a relief to be able to gabble," responded Mercy, upon whom the unusual scene

was beginning to lose something of its terrors, and who now felt that she liked excitement above all things.

"That boat is beyond the bounds," said Delight, her deep voice somewhat raised, in her anxiety. "But I call this a case where we must obey the higher law. You know Madame once gave the school a talk about that. Come on, Mercy; it would be perfectly inhuman for us to go back and not help that thing."

Mercy dipped her oar in the water in unison with that of her companion. The faces of the two girls were white with excitement, and their eyes shone like stars. The pulses of both were throbbing heavily, and each had a curious kind of feeling that it really was likely to be something uncanny, not of this earth, that they should come upon there in the bit of a shallop.

Mercy looked back. By the light of the lanterns she could see, far behind them, that the girls who had come in that direction were now rowing toward the boat-house. It was time to return. She did not think the others could ever be made to believe what

she had seen. She shivered a little; she wished she also could return. She glanced at her companion, and, finding that Delight was looking so preternaturally solemn, had much ado to keep herself from screaming outright from sheer agitation.

Instead, she bent to her oar, and the next moment they had reached the strange boat, while along the river's banks the mysterious flames were dying away.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT THERE WAS IN THE BOAT.

BY this time the river seemed very dark. There was no moon, and when Mercy put her hand out and laid hold of the edge of the other boat, she was guided only by the white clothing of the occupant.

"If we were only boys," she said, in a whisper, "we should have matches in our waistcoat pockets. What on earth is to be done?"

Even as she spoke, the eyes of the girls could distinguish a little more clearly in the darkness.

"Hullo, there! can't you wake?" shouted the Trombone, in her deepest voice.

Delight was really quaking with terror, and she felt that she must put on some semblance of bravery.

Nothing stirred in the boat.

"It has either fainted away or it is dead,"

said Delight. "Mercy, if you feel that you can, will you shake this being a little? I am sure I wish we hadn't come out to row to-night. Do you think it is a child?"

"No child could ever have handled a boat as this was handled."

As Mercy spoke, she put out a cold little hand and took hold of the shoulder of the figure in the boat, shaking it unsparingly.

"It is just limp and dead," she announced.

"Is there a rope in this boat?" Delight suddenly asked.

"Yes; you know it's a rule to have one in every boat."

Mercy felt about under the seat and drew forth the coil of rope.

"We'll just tow this craft down to our boat-house; it's the only thing we can do; and then we'll send for one of the teachers and give up our prize."

It took only a short time after Delight had thus spoken for the two to turn about and go rapidly down the river, towing the stranger after them.

"I feel like a pirate who has just captured a

ship," said Mercy, whose spirits were fast rising now.

Just as she spoke, there came a sound like a moan from the boat behind them.

Both girls instantly held their oars suspended in the air, while they looked at each other in consternation.

The moan was repeated, this time accompanied by a slight movement of the white pile in the bottom of the little boat. Then a head was raised, and a small, thin voice asked, petulantly:

"What's the matter?"

"We don't know what's the matter," muttered Mercy, under her breath, but Delight said:

"We found you on the river; we thought you had fainted, and we are towing you to our boat-house."

"Stop, then! Stop immediately!" cried out the shrill voice, which appeared to be masculine, although very strange and small.

"We are not rowing, as you will see," replied Delight, "but I think we must take you to the boat-house."

She did not know what else to do.

They were now opposite one of the lanterns, and both the girls saw that the occupant of the boat was a tiny dwarf dressed in what seemed a kind of tunic of white wool. He was bareheaded, and his hair, very light and fluffy, seemed to grow in a fringe around his head, leaving the top bald, something like that of a tonsured priest.

The girls afterward learned that he kept his head shaved in that way for some eccentric reason.

The dwarf scrambled into a sitting posture, and tried to seize his oars, but one was lost; still he could scull.

Even the girls, inexperienced as they were, saw directly that he was too weak to propel his boat. They had hoped he would be able to do so, and thus relieve them from the burden of responsibility, which they already began to feel to be rather heavy, particularly if this unknown person were going to forbid their taking him to their boat-house.

He could not raise the one oar he had found, he was so weak.

What a strange little face he had! Mercy was absorbed in looking at it. It was young, that of a boy of not more than fifteen or sixteen, she thought, but it surmounted a frame that might have belonged to a child of eight. Still, he had had strength to row.

"You are not able to go by yourself," said Delight, speaking more easily now that she saw the stranger was not older than themselves. "You must let us take you."

"I tell you I will not!" he cried out, fiercely. "I'll pitch myself over into the river first! We are too far down-stream as it is."

"What do you wish us to do, then?" asked Mercy, who had now lost all fear, and was quite enjoying the novelty of the situation.

"Take me back up the river. I shall not be strong enough to row or scull again until I have slept. I never do get back strength any sooner after I've had a fit. I suppose I had a fit, didn't I?"

He asked the question as calmly as if he were inquiring how far it was to a certain point on the river banks.

"It was a very quiet fit, then," replied Mercy.

"One of the worst kind," was the unexpected response.

This struck Mercy so ludicrously that she immediately inquired:

"Have you any great variety?"

"I have two phases of one kind; that is all that is necessary for one diminutive mortal to have on hand, I think. Don't you agree with me?"

"Decidedly," said Mercy, hardly daring to laugh as she wished to do.

"But this is wasting time; we shall be late for locking up if we are not careful," said Delight. "I hope you agree now to let us take you down."

"But I don't! You shall row me back."

The dwarf flung up his hands with an imperative gesture. Plainly, he usually had his way.

"Instead of being grateful to us for what we have done for you, you order us to do more," said Mercy, giving her head a toss. "And you don't care if we get into disgrace at the Institute."

"No; I don't care in the least," was the

response. "But I know I can't bear the sight of that part of the river, and I shall have another fit if you take me there. You are warned now."

There was indescribable astonishment on the faces of the two girls, but neither of them spoke. Both knew that more words would be useless, and both felt it would be inhuman to leave the dwarf where he was.

They took their oars and were soon hurrying up the river.

By this time the river was completely deserted by the girls who had been rowing, and Delight and Mercy could hear indistinctly their voices on the bank by the boat-house. The two knew very well they would be late, and they dreaded the waiting reprimand. As they rowed on in silence, it seemed to them that the explanation they would have to give for their lateness must appear very ridiculous.

They wondered who this dwarf was; they thought it very strange that they had never heard of him before, if he lived in the vicinity. If a sense of politeness had not prevented her, Mercy would have asked him his name boldly.

If he had not been deformed, she felt she could have plied him with a great many questions.

The stranger leaned back; in fact, he almost reclined in the bottom of his boat, and he spoke not a word for a long time, but the two girls felt his wonderfully bright eyes directed toward them when they passed near the lanterns.

Looking back once, Delight saw that the lanterns were now being extinguished. Larry, the man-of-all-work of the Institute, was going his rounds, and the girls knew that the rest were in the building, and that in a few minutes more they would all assemble to hear prayers read by Madame Delmont in the school parlour, and then the retiring bell would ring.

Delight, in imagination, could see Madame Delmont's keen, yet kind eyes looking along the rows of girls to see if all were there, and her heart sank at the thought of the displeased surprise which Madame would feel when she missed the two girls. But she would make no inquiries until after prayers, hoping the delinquents would come in, and then, before dismissal, she would ask the questions.

There was something in Madame Delmont's rule at Holden Mountain which made the girls feel their honour involved in obeying. The girl must be reckless, indeed, who could face the principal of the school, after any misdeed, and have no feeling of penitence, even though it were a very fleeting feeling.

"Might we ask how far up the river we are to row you?" questioned Mercy, at last, when the gas-works had been reached and passed, and the dwarf had made no sign.

He raised his head, which had been lying on the seat. They could see his eyes glitter through the dusk.

"It's about a quarter of a mile farther on," he replied, after he had looked around him.

Mercy half groaned, thinking how late it would be before, by any possibility, they could return.

"I really hope we shall not have to spend the night in the grounds," murmured Delight.

Soon they were within sight of a wharf running out into the river. It was painted white, and therefore could be seen in the darkness.

"There's the wharf of the Little Hope

House," remarked Delight. "It must have been newly painted or we couldn't have seen it so plainly."

The dwarf turned his head languidly. "That's where you are to land me," he said, in a weak voice.

"Little Hope" was a fine old stone mansion which had been vacant for the last five years. House and grounds had been cared for by a gardener and his wife.

It was a colonial house with restorations and additions, and it seemed to the Institute girls to be the ideal aristocratic country mansion.

The boat grazed against the white wharf, and Mercy leaned over and drew in the rope attached to the other boat. The stranger made an effort to rise, sank back, and partially suppressed a slight moan.

Mercy extended both hands, saying, pityingly:

"Let me help you! I didn't know you were so weak."

He staggered as he reached the wharf, and Delight said, quickly:

"Do go up to the house with him, Mercy. I'll wait here for you. It would be barbarous to leave him now."

The boy was so short, despite his years, that the well-grown girl could not offer him her arm to support him. She was puzzled. His piping voice said, despondently:

"You'll never get me up to the house unless you take me in your arms. I really don't weigh more than a few ounces. You might go up to the house to find Lewis; but no, he has gone away to-night, and our folks haven't come yet. The best thing you can do is to pitch me into the water. Then you can go back to your Institute and tell your Madame Delmont that you've done one good deed."

"Take him in your arms, Mercy," cried Delight, from the boat. "There's no other way."

Whereupon Mercy stooped and lifted the dwarf in her arms, where he clung with one arm placed lightly about her neck.

"I beg your pardon. I am sorry for you," he said, more seriously than he had yet spoken.

"MERCY STOOPED AND LIFTED THE DWARF IN HER ARMS"

"I hope you will not bother about me," she said, heartily. "I am glad to be of service to you!"

"Thank you."

That was all there was said until the strange couple reached the entrance to the stone house.

Mercy was directed to go to a certain door in one of the wings. She rang the bell there, and the dwarf insisted upon being put down upon his feet.

Presently the door was opened by a middle-aged woman who threw up her hands in amazement and exclaimed:

"Bless my soul! Master Sanxay, is that you? I thought you were in bed!"

For reply the dwarf mounted the threshold and asked:

"Has Lewis returned?"

"No, not yet."

He who had been called Master Sanxay turned to Mercy.

"I was going to send Lewis to row you down the river, but he is not here, as I feared, and the other servants will not come until my

father and mother arrive. I shall not forget how kind you two young ladies have been to me this evening. My name is Sanxay Ranier, and we are coming to live here now."

The queer little bit of humanity spoke with dignity, and after assuring him, in her best manner, that she was glad they had been able to aid him, Mercy hurried away, looking back once to see the white-clad figure still standing, leaning against the door-post.

CHAPTER III.

BACK AT THE INSTITUTE.

THE two girls, as they rowed rapidly down the river, were too much excited over their adventure to think of feeling any fear at being out so late. From down below in the village they heard the church clock strike eleven just before they reached the boat-house, and at the same moment the splash of oars sounded near them, a boat shot alongside, and as they shrank back, the voice of Larry asked:

"Are you some of our young ladies?"

He had been sent by Madame Delmont to look on the river for the missing girls, and he had been down first in the other direction, and was just going up when he met them.

Madame Delmont sat in her private parlour when there came a knock at her door. So anxious was she that, instead of calling "Come in," she rose and walked to the door and

opened it. There stood the two delinquents, and the principal immediately thought that their faces did not show any great guilt. But what had kept them?

"I am very glad to see you, for I have been very anxious," she said, gravely. "Sit down, and tell me what you have been doing."

Mercy Anthony's eyes were now fairly ablaze. Her mercurial nature was under great stimulation from what had happened.

"Oh, Madame!" she exclaimed, quickly, "did you ever see the river set on fire? And did you ever carry an unknown dwarf home in your arms? For that is what we have been doing."

Madame's fine eyes opened widely. For an instant she thought she would reprove the girl for such a wild speech, but the brilliant and lovely face disarmed her somewhat, as such faces will do. The lady glanced at Delight in her plain brown dress, now rumpled and draggled, with her shawl twisted awry.

Delight's face was as much excited as that of her companion, but she was capable of more control.

What on earth had these girls been doing? Instead of being full of excuses because they had transgressed the rules and were up for reprimand, they were entirely absorbed in some other thought.

Perhaps the secret of Madame Delmont's charm and power lay in the smile with which she now turned to Mercy.

"Tell me all about it," she said.

Quickly and with eager words the two girls told the story of the evening.

"You cannot imagine how strange it was," said Delight, in conclusion. "It seemed as if a little demon had set that blaze going. We thought he was going to be burned up before our eyes. It was really dreadful!"

The girl shuddered and put her hands over her eyes.

"There must have been benzine on top of the water," said Madame. "You say it was opposite the gas-works; that would account for the flame. The Raniers must be expected, if this were Sanxay Ranier whom you saw. They have been abroad. I remember to have heard their boy was not like others, but I did

not know he was so badly off as this; and he is their only child."

The last words were spoken more to herself than to the two girls.

They were sent to bed, where they dreamed of burning rivers, and quadratic equations, and dwarfs until the morning.

Long before the rising-bell rung, Kate McDonald put her head into Mercy's room to ask in a suppressed voice what had been the matter.

"There was a pretty time here about you. The man sent down to Mill Village to look for you didn't come back till after ten, and then hadn't found out anything. If the faculty had had bloodhounds they'd have been let loose. It must be something to know one is of so much consequence."

That day, as the girls were trooping into the main hall after morning prayers, there was spied standing at the door of Madame's parlour a man who bore a large basket of roses, whose perfume wandered along the wide hall in the fresh air. The sight and fragrance set every girl's heart a-dancing.

"Jacqueminots!" whispered one, gradually creeping toward the basket.

"Jean Duchers!" said another, clasping her hands in ecstasy.

"And that beautiful, beautiful Perle des Jardines!"

"If I were only Madame Delmont, to have such a basket in my room!"

"But where could they have grown?"

"New York, of course."

After the man had gone Madame herself appeared in the doorway, bearing the basket of flowers in her hand.

"For Miss Chantry and Miss Anthony," said she.

It was Mercy only who came forward, for Delight was a prisoner in her room with the headache.

"They have just been sent over from Little Hope, with young Sanxay Ranier's compliments to the young ladies who were so kind to him last night."

The recipient could only murmur incoherent thanks and bend her face over the odorous petals.

The other girls danced around the basket.

"To have had such a jolly time against rules, and then to be rewarded like this!" cried one.

"Yes; *we* might be out until midnight every day of the week, and no one would think of sending us Jacks for it!"

"No; *we* should get a prison cell and bread and water!"

"And think of Madame's smiles, too!"

"Who is Sanxay Ranier, anyway? Is he a prince, or just common flesh and blood?"

Mercy turned at this last question, her face flushing a little in her earnestness.

"You needn't laugh about Sanxay Ranier," she said. "He's a poor miserable little dwarf, for all his money; and he has fits."

"A dwarf who has fits! Gracious! But he must be interesting! You have very pleasing acquaintances, Miss Anthony."

This was said in a tone which had in it an unmistakable hardness and cruelty.

Mercy quickly set down the basket, as if she could not reply while holding the flowers.

"Who said that?" she asked, sharply.

A tall girl, dressed more showily than the rest, moved a few steps forward.

"I said it," she answered, with an aggressive self-possession.

She had a high-featured face, with eyes set too near together. She had only lately come, but she had fine dresses and a good deal of pocket-money, and immediately attained a certain kind of popularity.

There was the hush of expectation, for it was known that there was a kind of unacknowledged feud between these two, almost since Julia Bowers had come.

"What did you mean?" asked Mercy.

"What did I mean? What I said, of course. I hope you won't bring your dwarf where I can see him! Does he have a fit quite frequently? Ugh! How disgusting!"

To Mercy there was something maddening in the tone and words. Her hands, hanging down by her side, clenched tightly. She felt her eyes distend and burn. Had she been a boy it is probable that she would have "pitched into" Julia Bowers then and there.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FATE OF THE ROSES.

MERCY ANTHONY had, as yet, very little self-control. To try to make her more calm and cool had been one of Madame Delmont's endeavours.

"If you want to respect yourself, don't give way to anger."

This was a sentence she had heard so often from the principal that it came to her now.

Although the girl felt as if she were choking, and as if her heart were beating all through her, she determined not to reply, though some taunting words rose to her lips.

Her face was white, and her mouth tightly compressed, as she turned to take up the basket.

There was a slight murmur among the group of girls; a murmur of disappointment that, after all, there was to be no "scene."

"Mercy Anthony is losing her spirit."

That whisper came to the girl's ears and made her flush painfully.

"I don't consider it is spirit that makes one quarrel with a girl like Julia Bowers!" she said, quickly, and then, lest she should speak again, she started hurriedly down the hall, and all the girls followed more slowly. They felt that there was a sense of thunder in the air, and if there were to be a tempest, they wanted to be on the spot when it burst.

Two smaller girls brought up the rear of the straggling group.

"I say," said one of them, in a hushed whisper, "did you see Julia Bowers's face when Mercy said that?"

"No; I was looking at Mercy; didn't her eyes blaze, though?"

"But I'm afraid of Miss Bowers. She'll do something horrid to Mercy, see if she doesn't!"

This prophecy was partially fulfilled a moment later.

Julia paused and whispered rapidly to three girls who were among the staunchest of her adherents; then, before Mercy had gone

more than a few yards farther, the four suddenly hurried on, keeping close together, and one of them brushed so violently against Mercy that the basket fell from her hand, and at the next instant, in the hustling, another of the girls had fallen nearly flat on the floor, the basket of flowers under her and crushed into a hopeless mass.

"Oh, pray excuse me, Miss Anthony!" flippantly exclaimed the girl who had fallen against Mercy. "I was so very awkward."

Mercy stood leaning against the wall, very white and with a dangerous blaze in her eyes. She could not fail to know that this had all been arranged so that she might be annoyed.

The girl who had tripped and fallen had well effected her purpose. Frail basket and frailer roses were entirely destroyed. She now scrambled to her feet, apparently absorbed in the pain she suffered from her elbow, and making loud moans over it.

Meanwhile, the other girls gathered around the crushed roses which filled the air with sweetness.

There were loud outcries of sorrow, and

among the loudest voices was that of Julia Bowers.

Suddenly the latter felt a hand gripping her shoulder, and she heard the words:

"I'm glad I'm not as mean as you are! I despise you! I hate you!"

Julia looked around and shook off the touch, asking insolently:

"What's the matter now? Still thinking of your dwarf, are you?"

But, despite the insolence of her words, there was something in the furious anger of Mercy Anthony's face that somewhat cowed the tall girl.

"Stop talking about the dwarf!" commanded Mercy. "You have destroyed those beautiful roses, and you did it on purpose! Don't deny it! I won't hear you! Oh, won't somebody take you out of my sight?"

Absolutely unable to endure her anger any longer, Mercy raised her hand as if to strike the exasperating creature before her, when there was a quick sweep of garments a short distance down the hall, and the voice of Madame Delmont herself said:

"Mercy! Do not forget yourself! What is the meaning of all this?"

The lady was in the midst of the girls in a moment. Mercy's hand fell to her side, and she stood silent, with lowered eyes, trembling visibly. She knew that appearances were against her. She felt that she had forgotten to be a gentlewoman, for it seemed to her as if she had really struck Julia.

But there stood Julia as bold as brass, able to look Madame Delmont in the eyes, and to speak fluently.

"It was all an accident, Madame," she began, glibly. "Miss Mills ran against Miss Anthony and knocked the flowers from her hand, and Sarah More was so unlucky as to fall directly on the roses. You see we were hurrying too much. I am sure I heard Peggy Mills beg Miss Anthony's pardon; but we all know what Miss Anthony's temper is."

"Be silent!" said Madame Delmont. "If it be an accident, we will talk no more about it. I am sorry your flowers are ruined, Miss Anthony."

The lady let her eyes rest for an instant on

the dark, disturbed face of Mercy, and from that gaze the girl drew a certain strength. Then Madame was wise enough to walk away, feeling that the affair had not been an accident, but that it would have to be considered so.

Going down into the main schoolroom, Madame Delmont met the teacher of rhetoric.

"What is your opinion of Julia Bowers?" asked Madame, abruptly.

Miss Noyes hesitated, then she replied:

"I do not like her. The tone of the girls with whom she associates has not been as good as before she came, but I can bring nothing tangible against her. I may be unjust, but I wish she had never come here."

Madame went on; she mentally made a resolution to watch Julia Bowers.

"We shall have trouble with that girl," she thought, but she did not think how soon that trouble would come.

Mercy Anthony broke away from the girls and hurried into Delight's room. The reaction had come, and she flung herself on the bed beside Delight, and sobbed and cried with

such fury that Delight began to think she was going mad.

"Now just stop this," she said, at last, in her deepest tones. "What has happened? You won't have any head left, much less any eyes, if you go on in this way."

Mercy sat up and doubled her fists. Her eyes burned through her tears.

"I will get a revolver before I am a day older! I will not soil my hands by touching her, but I won't live in the same world with her! Oh, I won't!"

"Certainly not; by all means, no," was the response. "Would you mind telling me who has got to die in this dreadful way?"

"I always disliked her, and now I know why," went on Mercy. "She is a vile wretch—with her eyes so near together! and always out-dressing us all as if she were a king's daughter and we poor, squalid things! She did it on purpose! She meant to do it! And Madame Delmont will think I was going to hit her! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Delight seized Mercy's arm and shook her, although it made her poor head snap to do it.

"Are you crazy?" she asked. "Why does Madame Delmont think you were going to hit her? Gracious! You might better tell me what you are talking about!"

"My poor roses!—I mean our poor roses!" whined Mercy, subsiding from her belligerent state at that thought.

Delight sank back on the bed, and gazed upward at the ceiling, while she inquired, despairingly:

"Will any one tell me what the girl is talking about?"

Mercy was now regaining a slight degree of composure. With a great deal of savage emphasis she related the story of the roses and their destruction. Before she had finished the bell for recitation rang, and she dashed out and tore into her own room in that kind of hurry which nobody in the world but a schoolgirl or schoolboy can feel.

She was three minutes late, in spite of all she could do, and her books persisted in being upside down, and in dropping all the loose papers she had tucked between the leaves. Her heart was in a flutter, and her cheeks were

so painfully red that she wished she might cover them with her hands.

The recitation was algebra, and she was never particularly wise in that. Miss Holmes, the teacher, called upon her the very first one to demonstrate a problem on the board, and after mixing x and y in dreadful confusion for a few minutes, she walked to her seat in a reckless mood, not caring that several in the class giggled when they looked at what she had written.

"Miss Anthony will explain her problem," said Miss Holmes, a quarter of an hour later.

Miss Holmes glanced at the blackboard and remarked quietly:

"I should think any one might find it difficult to explain that. You may remain after hours with me."

Mercy banged her book together with angry emphasis. She heard Julia Bowers, who had just successfully explained a difficult problem, whisper distinctly the words:

"Did you ever see such an idiot?"

The words stung her as with a poisoned knife. She felt that she could not endure

much more that morning; but she made a great effort to control herself. The memory of Madame Delmont's voice and look came to help her, and she knew she had not prepared this lesson as she should have done.

Miss Holmes, the teacher of mathematics, was a woman with a short temper. Stupidity exasperated her.

"Miss Anthony," she said, "I shall set you two extra problems to work."

"It's no good setting me problems," retorted Mercy, defiantly.

CHAPTER V.

MERCY IN DISGRACE.

THE girl had suddenly ceased all effort toward self-command. She felt very wicked and very unhappy.

"You need not answer," said Miss Holmes, sternly.

But Mercy was not silent. She flung her head back and said again:

"I say it's no good setting me problems. I never can do them; and what is more, I shall not try."

"Miss Anthony!"

In the silence which followed Mercy heard a faint titter from Julia Bowers. The sound made her start up in her seat and dash her book and slate on the floor.

"Get Miss Bowers to work out the problems," she cried; "as for me, I won't stay here for her to laugh at me!"

Mercy stalked to the door with her head in the air and eyes blazing, but Miss Holmes glided in front of her and stood between her and the door. The teacher was hardly more than a girl herself, and she had never been spoken to in this way before. She was evidently trying to maintain her dignity, and her face was perfectly colourless with the effort.

"You will not go out at present," she said. "I order you to go to your seat, while I write a note for you to take to Madame Delmont."

"Write your note," said Mercy haughtily. "I will not go back to my seat, but I will wait."

Miss Holmes had sufficient penetration to know that, having said those words, Mercy would not attempt to escape, so she walked to the farther end of the room to her desk and hastily wrote the following words:

"DEAR MADAME DELMONT: — The bearer of this note has been impertinent and insubordinate.

"S. H. HOLMES."

She gave the folded paper to Mercy, who walked out of the class-room with it in her hand.

In the long hall the sweet atmosphere of June suddenly gave the girl a heartache; but she did not lower her head an inch. She would not think at all. The school clock struck sonorously eleven times. Eleven o'clock! It seemed to her that days and days had passed since that basket of roses had been destroyed. She felt that she was growing wicked very fast indeed.

She did wish very much that she might see Delight for one moment. She thought that the honest gray eyes of her friend might do her some good.

She had been going on mechanically toward Madame Delmont's parlour, but now she suddenly paused, feeling as if she could not possibly deliver that note, and meet the eyes of the principal fixed upon her, with the look in them that she knew would be there.

She stood still, with the note fluttering in her fingers, then turned and ran down the hall as if she were pursued. She was possessed by the one idea that she must get away; she could never see Madame Delmont after having behaved as she had done. And yet, in her

fiery little heart, there was a confused but strong sense that she had been dealt with unjustly. Julia Bowers had gotten the better of her, and in such a way that Julia would not be punished, while she would be.

But she could run away! This last idea came to her just as she reached the outer door, and looked across the fields, seeing the glint of the Holden River down in the valley.

Impetuous, smarting under a sense of wrong, the girl turned and dashed back to her own room, where she seized her hat and shawl. At that hour of the day there was not likely to be any one in the halls. In a moment more Mercy was hurrying across the fields, not toward the river, but in the direction of Mill Village, which was situated on a rushing tributary of the Holden.

She had not chosen her direction from any reason more defined than that of impulse. She told herself that, when the search for her began, it would start with the river. If it were found that she was not really anywhere in the building or the grounds, she was sure that her fondness for the river would be recalled. If

the boat-house had not been locked it would have been a temptation for her to take a boat and go down with the current. But she knew very well she could not find a boat, so she walked on among the dandelions, the excitement of her sudden resolution still sustaining her, and the bright sunlight acting as a stimulant.

She had left in her room the note of which she had been the bearer, otherwise that might have hinted to her of repentance.

She was upheld by the triumphant feeling that she was escaping from injustice. If Julia Bowers could manage to behave as she did, and go unpunished, what was the sense in her own disgrace? No; everything was wrong; she would cut the whole thing.

She put her hand in her pocket. How lucky that she had her purse with her. Her monthly allowance of five dollars had come the day before, and she had only spent a dollar of it at the pastry cook's in Mill Village.

There was a station at Mill Village, the station of a branch road that ran some twenty miles to a town of considerable importance.

Without calculating beyond that point, Mercy walked to the station, a mile and a half across the fields.

There was a train just rushing up as she mounted the platform, and without a moment's hesitation she sprang on the step, and when the train again started, leisurely sauntered through the car in search of a seat.

She was silly enough to feel of considerable importance. Her cheeks were redder and her eyes brighter than usual. Her whole aspect, if she had only known, was one of excited defiance. But she thought she looked very calm, even nonchalant.

"One of the Institute girls," whispered one lady to another.

"And she looks as if she were running away," was the response from the other lady, who was of middle age, and who had that patrician air which comes of generations of culture and refinement.

She watched Mercy, who had taken her seat a short distance in advance, on the other side of the car.

After a few moments the lady said to her companion:

"How very handsome that girl is! She is like a splendid tropical flower. And she is certainly in some sort of trouble. I don't like that defiant toss of the head, and I don't believe it is natural to her. She is trying to keep her courage up. I am going to speak to her."

The lady rose and sat down in the seat directly behind Mercy, and there came to the girl the odour of violets from a bunch which the stranger wore at her belt.

The next moment, much to her surprise, Mercy heard a musical voice addressing her.

"I beg your pardon, but are you going far in this direction?"

Mercy blushed. She was utterly unable for the first moment to answer, and then she stammered out the words:

"I really have not decided; I had thought that I should go as far as — as far as —"

Here she paused in extreme confusion.

The lady was silent for a moment, then she asked:

"Do you know what train this is?"

"The train to Royal, of course," replied Mercy, now venturing to glance once more at the fine face so near her own.

"It goes through Royal, certainly, but it is the express train to New York. It will not stop again within a hundred miles of here."

Mercy clasped her hands. She had vaguely contemplated telegraphing to her guardian from Royal. Now she began to be alarmed, and to wonder what would really be the end of this.

"But I thought these were only local trains," she said, looking eagerly about her.

"It is a new arrangement," was the reply, and then the lady asked:

"Are you not one of the Institute girls?"

"Yes; I am — I was."

"Don't think me impertinent," went on the melodious voice, "but I am interested in you. I am afraid you are running away. I am so much older than you that I am sure you will let me advise you to go back."

"But I can't; you told me the train did not stop."

"That is true. Meanwhile, will you tell me what the trouble is?"

At this point the conductor came along. Mercy had no ticket, and she found it impossible to say to what place she wished to go. She found herself in a very foolish position.

She at last mentioned the name of the town where the first stop was made. The lady motioned to the conductor, who bent his head and listened to her whispered words, while she gave him money and took the ticket he handed her.

"I have money with me!" exclaimed Mercy, turning around. "Indeed, you make me very miserable! I am not a beggar!"

The tears began to come in her eyes.

"I had no idea you were a beggar," was the response. "We will talk of that some other time. Now tell me what has happened to you."

Mercy could not resist the voice and look. She plunged into a somewhat tumultuous narrative, beginning with the evening before, when she and Delight had been on the river and had met the dwarf in such a peculiar fashion.

"He was very strange; I think he has queer

notions, but he is a real gentleman," said Mercy, after she had told everything about their rowing the boy home, and how she carried him up to his own door, because he was too weak to walk. So absorbed was the girl in her story that she did not notice any change in the lady's face. She went on until she came to the roses, and then her listener said, in a low voice:

"Ah! that was like Sanxay!"

Then Mercy paused, and, looking at her companion, saw the curious, softened look on the high-bred countenance.

"You know Sanxay Ranier!" she exclaimed.

"He is my son," Mrs. Ranier replied.

Mercy sank back in her seat, her eyes falling, asking herself in terror if she had said anything to wound the boy's mother. But she could not recall any word she wished unsaid, for her memories of the dwarf were very pleasant.

"You were kind to the son; now the mother will be kind to you," said Mrs. Ranier, speaking almost gaily.

CHAPTER VI.

HUNTING FOR THE FUGITIVE.

AT the Institute Mercy's absence was not discovered until after the dinner-hour.

The girls were too hungry at first to take much note as to who was present and who was not; when it came to pudding they began to glance around and to converse.

"Mercy Anthony is probably having bread and water in retirement," said Julia Bowers to her right-hand neighbour. "I hope she relishes her dinner. I never did see such a display of temper. I hope none of us will be murdered in our beds one of these nights."

Miss Bowers spoke in a tone that Miss Holmes might overhear, looking furtively at that lady.

The latter possessed a sense of justice which made her turn and say, with some severity:

"It is silly to talk like that, Miss Bowers.

Miss Anthony has been very impertinent and she has a quick temper, but she would never commit a crime, I am sure."

"Even she will stand up for her, will she?" thought Julia.

Delight Chantry was not present at dinner. She was still confined to her room by her headache.

After dinner Miss Holmes, feeling somewhat anxious about her saucy pupil, sought Madame's parlour.

"I was sorry to be obliged to send Mercy Anthony up," she said. "The girl really has a noble nature, I think, but she was very saucy in the algebra recitation."

Madame turned from the bookcase where she was standing.

"But I have not seen her," she said, in surprise.

"Not seen her!" exclaimed the teacher, and then the story of Mercy's conduct was told.

Madame's face became overcast, though she was far from suspecting the truth.

"She is doubtless in her room," she said, and she went quickly to Mercy's door. She

found it slightly open, for the girl had dashed off in too great a hurry to think of anything but to get away.

After her first glance, which told her that Mercy was not there, Madame's eyes fell upon a crumpled bit of paper on the floor. She picked it up and found it was the note Miss Holmes had sent to her.

Now the principal began to feel alarmed.

"This is not like her," she said to herself; "I did not think the girl was a coward."

She instantly thought of Mercy's particular friend, Delight Chantry, and the next moment she was knocking at the door across the way.

Delight was asleep at last, and said, in a dreaming voice, "Come in," but she started up, wide awake, when Madame appeared at her bedside.

"I hoped to find your friend Mercy with you," said Madame.

Delight raised herself on her elbow, and the blinding pain above her eyes began again. She instantly remembered the fury in which Mercy had left her and rushed to recitation in the morning.

"Oh, what is the matter?" she cried. "Is Mercy in disgrace? I don't believe she has done anything bad. Where is she?"

"That is what I hoped you could tell me," was the reply, and Madame briefly related what she knew, ending by saying:

"But of course she is in the grounds somewhere. It will be painful to me to punish her as I shall be obliged to do." And she left the room to order the grounds to be searched.

Thus left, Delight could not remain still. Though her head throbbed and burned, she rose and dressed hurriedly, and went out into the hall, the first person she met there being Julia Bowers, who informed her in a very solemn tone that Mercy Anthony had run away, and that the police were to be put on her track.

"I always thought she would disgrace the Institute," she concluded, "and I only hope she hasn't stolen anything. I am going to look over my things to see if they are all there; she always liked that gold penholder so much."

Delight looked at the girl with ill-suppressed fury.

"Of course you judge people by yourself," she said, and walked away.

The grounds were ransacked, but, as we know, the search was unavailing.

It was now nearly three o'clock. The pupils had been rigorously summoned to the schoolroom at the proper time, and the usual routine was kept up, but in the minds of all the girls was the exciting knowledge that one of their number had run away. What would happen next?

Madame had just sent Larry down to Mill Village to make inquiries, while she was going to drive in the opposite direction, when Delight, who was the only one excused from school duties, and who was standing on the piazza gazing down the road as if she expected her friend to appear there, saw the form of a half-grown boy turn the corner and approach. He held something yellow in his hand. Delight turned and ran to Madame's room, where that lady was putting on her shawl and bonnet.

The telegram read thus:

"To Madame Delmont, *Holden Mountain Institute:*
— Am on my way to you with Miss Anthony.
"Mary Ranier."

She looked up from the message and ordered the horse back to the stable. Then, glancing again at the bit of paper, she said:

"But stay. I will go to the station. The next train is due in half an hour."

She had nearly reached the carriage when she remembered Delight, whose anxiety was fully equal to her own. She looked back and saw the forlorn figure standing with one arm about a pillar, watching her with a wistful, eager face.

"Would you like to come with me?" asked Madame, and the next moment the girl was seated beside her.

They arrived at the station some minutes before it was time for the train.

Delight could not sit still; she left the carriage and walked quickly up and down the platform.

At last the train was heard, the whistle sounding from the lower crossing.

Among the people who alighted was Mercy Anthony, and she was instantly seized upon by Delight, who exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper:

"I hope you have made sensation enough this time, you horrid little thing! What do you mean by frightening us all to death and then coming back in this style?"

Mercy looked weary and much subdued, but there came a flicker of her old spirit into her eyes as she asked:

"Would you rather I hadn't come back at all?"

There was no time for more words now. Delight saw with immediate admiration the lady to whom Mercy turned, and whom she led toward the carriage where Madame sat. Delight had not known who had sent the telegram, and she followed now, feeling curiosity as well as interest. She saw with amazement Madame quickly step from the carriage and advance toward the stranger with both hands outstretched, and a look of glad greeting on her face.

Naturally the two girls shrank back, and they failed to hear the words which passed

between the old acquaintances. Soon, however, Mrs. Ranier turned, and, taking Mercy's hand in her own, she said in words which sounded lighter than her voice:

"This is the fugitive, Madame Delmont. She has lost her bravado air altogether, as you see. I promised to defend her in this dread interview. Will you take her back?"

"Certainly I will take her back," was the reply. "We will talk this matter over when we have reached the Institute,"—she turned to Mrs. Ranier and begged that she would be her guest until the evening,—"and then I will drive you to Little Hope, if you wish," she added.

The two girls were crowded on the front seat with the boy who was driving. They had not gone many rods before Delight reached forward and whispered in her companion's ear:

"Is she a friend of the Raniers? Why does she go to Little Hope?"

"She is Mrs. Ranier herself," was the answer, with something of a triumphant tone.

"The dwarf's mother?"

Mercy nodded, and Delight opened her eyes to their utmost extent to signify her amazement.

"Where in this world did you pick her up?"

"It was she who picked me up," and then in an enthusiastic whisper, "I tell you she is splendid!"

"Easy enough to see that," the other responded, calmly.

After this Mercy sank into a very despondent state, and averred that she would rather be put on the rack than go through the coming interview with Madame Delmont.

"The punishment, whatever it is, won't be half so bad as the interview. Oh, dear, I feel as if I should drown myself!"

Mercy covered her face with her hands, and sat thus until the carriage turned into the drive through the grounds of the Institute. Then she looked up, and her dark cheeks were red, her darker eyes burning. If she saw Julia Bowers, she would not blench, she told herself; so it happened that it was a somewhat defiant-looking girl who left the carriage and stepped up on to the piazza.

There were several pupils strolling about; they all stood and stared intently. Mercy's one swift and sweeping glance told her that Julia Bowers was not among them.

She was sent to her room to remain until Madame should send for her. Delight was forbidden to go to her. As Madame went to Little Hope with Mrs. Ranier, the summons did not come until after nine o'clock in the evening. Thus the culprit had plenty of time to meditate on what she had done, and to wonder what would now be done to her.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE ALGEBRA CLASS.

MEANWHILE it was not ten minutes after her arrival before the fact was known that Mercy Anthony had been brought back, and the tongue of every girl in school was wagging on the subject. Some, taking their cue from Julia Bowers, wondered if she really had stolen anything, but that thought was scouted by nearly all the pupils as being too preposterous to be entertained at all.

Watch and wonder as they would, nothing was seen that night of Mercy Anthony, and nothing transpired.

Delight decided that she also would stay in her own room, and, indeed, her head was still "very odd," as she informed Kate McDonald, who came to call upon her after prayers, and to make some inquiries.

"Don't ask me," said Delight, fretfully. "I

don't know where she has been, nor what is going to be done about it. You'll have to wait and see."

"But that lady isn't the dwarf's mother really, is she?" persisted Kate, sitting down on the foot of Delight's bed.

"Yes, she is."

"Well, then, I must say that if ever two girls were in luck, you two are. You've just made a friend of her by having a chance to be kind to her little manikin, and now probably she will influence Madame to give Mercy a reward of merit for running away. That will be the end of this affair. Some folks are born to have greatness thrust upon them," she finished in a doleful whine.

"Don't you think, Kate, your imagination is rather getting control of you? Do go away now and leave me. I want to go to sleep."

Kate went to the door, then put her head back to say:

"We shall see what will happen in the algebra class to-morrow morning," and at last vanished.

The girl had rightly predicted that Mercy

could hardly be allowed to make her appearance at that time as if nothing had occurred.

When Delight took her place for the algebra recitation all the girls were there save Mercy Anthony, and there was a sense of expectation in the air. Miss Holmes was at her desk.

Directly, however, the door opened, and Madame appeared, followed by Mercy, who looked very pale and very resolute.

Madame sat down on a chair close to the entrance, and Mercy walked quickly up to Miss Holmes, who rose as she approached.

"I wish to say I behaved very ill to you yesterday," began Mercy, in a high, distinct voice. "I am sorry, and I beg your pardon."

The look of wretchedness and excitement on Mercy's face touched the teacher instantly, and, in truth, she was not one to bear the child malice.

"I am sure I forgive you with all my heart," she replied, earnestly, and then some quiver in Mercy's face made Miss Holmes suddenly put her hand on the girl's shoulder and stoop and lightly kiss her forehead.

That kiss might better not have been given, for it put to rout Mercy's hardly-kept self-control. The kindness made her cover her face with her hands, and sobs shook her slight frame.

"Go to your seat," said Miss Holmes, and she instantly began the lesson, so that Mercy had time to recover herself.

And this was the end of that episode in Mercy's life. There was no punishment inflicted upon her.

That night, when Delight was with her in her room, and suggested that she should be told what Madame had said the evening before, Mercy's expressive face grew grave, and she said, more seriously than she usually spoke:

"I am not going to talk about it, even to you, Delight; but I hope when I grow up I can be as glorious a woman as Madame is! But that is absurd enough, isn't it?" and then Mercy continued her tale of the adventures which befell her in the hours while she was away.

As the faithful Trombone kissed her friend good-night, she said:

"The worst of you, Mercy, is that one never knows what you'll do next; only I am always sure it won't be anything mean, your temper is too short. But I can be in better business attending to my own faults, than telling you yours," and Delight betook herself to her own room, while Mercy, as she put her head on her pillow, said to herself:

"It's a fact about my temper. I am frightened about it myself; it just blazes up before I can do anything to keep it down, and when it once gets in a flame, it's just no use."

Matters in the Holden Mountain Institute went on very calmly for the next few weeks. The little ripple created by Mercy's escapade soon subsided. It was summer now, and the pupils were preparing ardently for the exhibition which was always held at this season.

This time there was to be something more pretentious than anything before attempted. The instructor in rhetoric, Miss Noyes, had written a little historical play, adapting the characters as well as she could to the different girls who were to personate them. She had chosen the time of Mary Stuart's residence in

Holyrood, and the Scottish queen, her maids of honour, and female attendants were the characters. The topic, perhaps, was rather ambitious, but the plot and the carrying it out were simple enough. The catastrophe was the discovery of a plan to imprison some of Mary's friends, and showed how the clouds were already lowering over that unfortunate woman.

The whole was done with considerable skill, and the "affecting parts," as the girls called the pathetic passages, were written very well indeed.

They were all wild over the play, and began the study of it as soon as the parts were assigned.

"Won't it be jolly?" cried Kate McDonald; "and the costumes!"

"There is'n't a girl in the school who can take the part of the queen," said Julia Bowers, decisively.

A murmur of assent from the Bowers faction followed.

"Well, then, there is," was the emphatic rejoinder from Kate.

"Who is it?" asked Julia; "I suppose it isn't a secret?"

"Not a bit of it. It's Mercy Anthony."

"Gracious!" Miss Bowers was greatly affected by the preposterousness of this idea. "I don't see how we can have a black Mary Stuart," she went on. "Everybody knows that the queen was fair, and that her hair was light, or reddish."

"Mercy isn't black," asserted Kate.

"But even you will be kind enough to admit that she *is* dark," said Julia, in her most exasperating tone.

"No matter; she can wear a wig, and I'll paint her face and her eyebrows," replied Kate, who was now rather bent upon irritating Julia; "and," she added, "Mercy is the only girl here who has an air, — a bearing. You'll see who'll be chosen."

"An air! a bearing! For my part I can't conceive what there is in that little tanned thing to make some of you girls rave so!"

Kate, having had what she called "a rise" out of Miss Bowers, turned away.

Events proved that Kate had been a true

prophet. When the list was given out by Madame Delmont, opposite the words, "Mary Stuart," was the name of Mercy Anthony. Among the other actors were some of the girls we know, Delight, Kate McDonald, and Julia Bowers.

When the latter had read the appointments, she said, sullenly:

"I shall not take my part."

"Why not?"

"It's nothing but that of a servant to call people to supper, or something of that sort."

"But you'll have to take it; we can't all be queens, you know."

Julia crumpled the paper in her hand and went to her room. She knew there was no appeal. She was not heard to grumble any more, but there was a spark of anger in her heart which kept growing larger and larger.

CHAPTER VIII.

QUEEN MARY'S MARYS.

THIS first rehearsal was a time that tried the author's soul. How could those girls be so stupid? It was not until Mercy, as Mary, entered, that Miss Noyes drew a breath of relief. The girl seized upon the sense of each sentence, and her unconscious grace went well with her picturesque and tropical face.

After her first speech of greeting to Mary Beaton, who had returned to her after an absence, Miss Noyes dropped her roll of manuscript and softly clapped her hands.

Mercy's face flushed with surprise and pleasure, and Delight Chantry, who was Mary Beaton, whispered hurriedly:

"Look at Julia Bowers! She will put arsenic in your coffee to-morrow morning!"

Julia had averted her face. The dialogue went on, but Delight could not forget the

look of hate she had seen in Julia's countenance when Miss Noyes had applauded.

"She'll bear watching," she thought. She soon forgot everything, however, but her interest in the play, and when Kate McDonald, as Mary Hamilton, came in singing the old rhyme in her high, sweet voice, Delight did not remember the existence of Julia Bowers.

"There was Mary Beaton,
And Mary Seaton,
And Mary Carmichael
And me."

Then the four Marys took up the song to pleasure their queen, and their fresh glad voices rang through the hall.

Great was the astonishment of all the girls when Julia, after the rehearsal, congratulated Mercy on the way she had taken her part.

"For all that," thought Delight, "I don't like the look in her eye."

Every day was crowded after this, and twice busy were those upon whom depended the fate of "Queen Mary's Marys," as the play was called.

The costumes had been ordered by Madame from New York, and were to be in every way like those worn in Mary Stuart's time. Do you wonder that the girls were half wild, and could think of nothing else? To add to the excited expectation, the school was invited for the day after the exhibition, which fell on a Wednesday, to a garden party at Little Hope, in celebration of Sanxay Ranier's birthday.

The day came at last, and the large hall was crowded. The curtain in front was a miracle of an amateur curtain, for it would roll up, and it would also roll down.

All the minor "pieces" came first. Then the people consulting their programmes found the play was to be next.

Madame Delmont, sitting near the stage, could hardly conceal her anxiety, but the curtain at last rose, and Delight Chantry, alone, delivered the opening lines. She spoke so clearly, and with such just emphasis, that Madame almost felt assured of the success of the affair. Close to her heart, however, was the thought of Mercy Anthony, and when,

with a flourish of instrumental music, the girl came in and spoke to Mary Beaton, there was that soft yet queenly courtesy in her manner and her speech that directly moved the audience, and they applauded vigorously.

One might well have been surprised at Mercy's appearance. No one would have known her in the rich and beautiful trained dress, setting with such quaint grace upon her girlish figure; the hair of a reddish tint, the eyebrows no longer dark, the complexion clear and somewhat fair. The dusky eyes showed more lovely than ever in such guise. But after the first delight in her costume, Mercy forgot it entirely, and as the play proceeded she was absorbed more and more in her part.

But only with the last scene have we a particular interest. It was then that something occurred which had not been set down.

During the whole play Julia Bowers had behaved, as Delight herself had acknowledged, in a perfect manner. She was a mere servant, and she had "effaced herself" as a

servant should do. Behind the scenes she had been kind, and had helped about the dressing, for she possessed a "knack" in the matter of arranging a ribbon or a fall of lace.

The curtain was up for the last scene. Mary Hamilton and Mary Carmichael were on, and talking of some late severity of John Knox toward their beloved queen. In a moment all the rest of the characters, save the queen and the serving-maid, Julia Bowers, had entered. News had been received of a new wickedness of Darnley's, and Mary was both sorrowful and alarmed; she expected to leave Holyrood; clouds from England were gathering over her. The scene was to be impressive.

Before Mary came upon the stage there was to be a slight change of dress; her garb was to be more subdued. There was scant time to make the change, and Julia Bowers hurriedly assisted. The two were alone in the little curtained recess that served as dressing-room. Quickly Julia's hands moved about, arranging head-dress and lace. She had put Mercy

down in a chair, and she knew very well that the girl was thinking of nothing but her part. Boldly, with two or three dashes of scissors, two or three twists of deft fingers, Julia did her work, and stepped back just in time to exclaim in a whisper:

"There's our cue! We must go on!"

Mercy, who had been listening for the cue, started up and walked on to the stage, followed by Julia, so that now all the characters were present.

Some indescribable change passed over the faces of the four Marys as they looked at their queen, who addressed Delight in a tone of love and sorrow:

"Beaton, my sweet friend, it grieves my heart that I must think of parting from thee. Comfort in sorrow thou hast always been to me," and she went on, too absorbed to see the curious look on Delight's countenance; thinking still of nothing but the spirit of the part she was personating.

Poor Delight! she seemed to be threatened with a convulsion. After one look at her queen she had instantly cast her eyes down,

and now stood with drooped eyelids, while her countenance worked painfully.

Among the other Marys there was a sound like a half-strangled titter, and there was an ominous movement among the audience, — a movement evidently restrained now by good breeding. Madame Delmont, on Mercy's last entrance, had actually grown pale with vexation as she looked at her; she had half risen from her chair, and then had sunk back again, and was now gazing at the stage with contracted brow and compressed lips.

Sanxay Ranier and his mother sat very near the principal, and the dwarf's small, supersensitive face was a sight to see, there was so much of surprised anger in it.

Mercy, seeing Delight's continued hesitation, began to think she had forgotten her part. Where was Miss Noyes, who had been acting as prompter all the evening? That lady, after one look at Mercy on her last entrance, had fled into one of the vacant rooms, where she was weeping tears of rage and disappointment.

Mercy now, in order to assist Delight, and

give her time to remember, repeated her own lines.

Delight, still with her eyes on the ground, twisting her fingers forcibly together, now managed to speak the words of her part, uttering them in a hoarse monotone, with no particle of expressiveness.

Julia Bowers stood in her place to the left of the queen, and behind her. She also had her eyes cast down, and her face was as immovable as if it had been cast in bronze.

When Delight had finished speaking, she had an attack that resembled strangling, which appeared to be brought on by one quick glance that she ventured to give her queen as she ended her response to her.

Instead of standing still to hear if Mercy had any more lines to repeat, Delight began to back away, with her head bent, and continued to undergo the symptoms of strangling.

There were more pronounced signs of some emotion among the audience, still held in check, however.

Mary, Queen of Scots, had not said all she had to say to her faithful Mary Beaton,

and she made a surprised motion to recall her, which the maid of honour obeyed, coming up much closer than was necessary, and managing to say, in a gurgling whisper:

"For goodness' sake, hurry up! You'll kill us all!"

The queen stared, and asked, in a rapid aside, audible only to the girl she addressed:

"Are you crazy? Go on with your part!"

And then she instantly went on with the remainder of her own speech, which had been intended to move the loving Beaton to tears, and to affect the other three maids of honour.

Delight plainly made a mighty effort to gain self-control, an effort which sufficed only to cause her to be able to stand still like a block, and listen to the affecting words which Mercy uttered with an intensity of pathos which, under the proper circumstances, would have brought real tears to Delight's eyes.

The three other Marys had evidently also resolved to stand their ground; they would not retreat; but they could not look at their queen.

At last Mary Beaton was permitted to step back, and now the queen addressed Mary Hamilton. It will be remembered this was the part assumed by Kate McDonald.

Here Sanxay Ranier again whispered to his mother:

"I declare those girls are good stuff! I should do something worse than they do."

Mary Hamilton did not choke in the least. She replied instantly in a high-pitched voice that rang all over the hall, and her words were spoken so rapidly that no one understood a syllable. The next thing she did was to raise her eyes to the queen, and then she turned and ran off the stage, her long silk train swishing and rustling behind her.

The audience felt that they could endure no more; they broke into prolonged peals of laughter, which were increased when Mary Stuart turned to them with a look of wonder.

"She certainly acts as if she didn't know what we are laughing at," thought the dwarf.

Delight caught hold of Mercy's arm and pulled her out into the dressing-room, while the other girls followed, including Julia

Bowers, who now permitted herself to join in the merriment.

Delight's grip unconsciously tightened on the arm she held. She was not laughing now; she was looking very angry. The play had failed; had been turned into ridicule at the moment of its success.

"This is too much, Mercy!" she cried. "I cannot see what you mean! It's too bad! I didn't think you would do such a thing!"

But Mercy was far more angry than any of them. She considered that the play had failed through some incomprehensible manœuvre of the other girls. She shook off Delight's hand fiercely.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "You have ruined everything among you! What set you giggling and choking? Are you a set of idiots?"

"How much do you think we can bear?" suddenly asked Kate McDonald. "You come on the stage in that style, and then talk of our giggling and choking! It's a mercy we were not choked to death, I say!"

Mercy glared savagely, and then there was

something that made the girls suddenly fall to laughing again in that convulsive, overwhelming way known only to schoolgirls.

But Delight Chantry laughed only a moment. She saw that she had misjudged her friend; and she saw also that Mercy was fast becoming dangerously angry. She again took her arm, and retained it in spite of the twitch that tried to free it. She led Mercy to the small mirror which had been hung in the improvised dressing-room.

"Look there," she said.

Mercy looked in the glass. She saw that the head-dress had been removed from her head, that half the fair wig had been cut off, the remaining half having been held in place by two long hairpins. So one half her hair was deep black, the other of a bright fairness that made a striking contrast.

"And as if that were not enough," said Delight, "your train is pinned up above the tops of your shoes behind. You are a ridiculous-looking object. Neither Charlotte Cushman nor Ristori could be pathetic in such a rig as that. You look as if you were

drunk, or had had a fight. Now what does it mean?"

Before Mercy could answer, Julia Bowers said:

"I told her that she would be carrying a joke too far. But she was bound to have a lark."

Mercy turned and gazed at the speaker stupefied.

CHAPTER IX.

"IT CAN NEVER BE PROVED."

BEFORE any one else had spoken further, the heavy curtain which screened the dressing-room from the hall was put back, and Madame Delmont entered. Miss Noyes had not yet the courage to appear. Madame's face was stern. It seemed to her unpardonable that the play should have been ruined so wantonly. Mercy might have high spirits and an inordinate love of fun, but this, indeed, was too much. It was almost incredible, too, that Mercy should have played such a trick, when she had seemed so to enter into the spirit of her part. It had, doubtless, been the result of a sudden, mischievous impulse. Who would suppose that it could have been done by any one save Mercy, or without her knowledge?

The girls all became silent when the principal appeared.

"Miss Anthony," she said, in a low voice, "go to your room."

Mercy had been gazing at Julia all this time. With an effort she now turned and looked at Madame. Then she stammered:

"I do not understand, — it was very unlucky. How did it happen?"

"I must have been entirely mistaken in this girl," thought Madame. Aloud she said, coldly, "Do not reply. Go to your room."

Delight suddenly stepped forward and said, quickly:

"Please, Madame, listen to me for one moment! Mercy couldn't have done it! She was too much interested in the success of the play, — she loved her part too well! She couldn't have done it!"

"Pray how could it have been done without Miss Anthony's knowledge and consent?" said Madame. "We will not talk any more on the subject now."

Mercy turned and walked away, presenting, as she went, a spectacle ludicrous in the extreme.

"The rest of you will change your dresses

and be ready for the collation," said Madame, and then she lifted the curtain again and returned to the hall, where she was greeted by many remarks and questions, to all of which she replied, briefly:

"It was some very ill-chosen practical joke."

To Mrs. Ranier she said more:

"I could have believed such a thing of any girl in school sooner than of Mercy Anthony. It is painful to have one's opinion so changed. It was a mean trick. I am deeply disappointed."

Sanxay was standing near his mother and he overheard the words. He touched Madame's arm and said, with respectful emphasis:

"She did not do it! I've been thinking it over, and I'm sure she isn't the girl to do a mean thing like that."

The lady did not believe what the dwarf said, but she liked him for saying it. In a moment he spoke again:

"Please don't keep her away from my party to-morrow, Madame Delmont."

"She is in disgrace. I cannot let her go," was the reply.

Perhaps it was because Julia Bowers was so very active in carrying about coffee and cake at the supper that Delight Chantry was rather a laggard in that respect.

She was standing near one of the open windows, gazing gloomily about her, when a voice at her elbow said:

"Where is she?"

Delight turned and saw the dwarf looking earnestly up at her. He had a small tray with cake and ice-cream upon it. Delight replied immediately:

"In her room."

"Locked in?"

"Oh, no; I think not."

"You know the way there?"

"Of course."

"Show me, then, if you please."

Delight hesitated, and Sanxay said:

"It's not against the rules, is it?"

"No."

"Go ahead, then, and if there's anything said, I'll come to the front."

Delight turned and went out at the nearest door, followed by the boy, bearing his tray.

Here they met Julia Bowers, who made some gay remark as they passed. Sanxay looked at her and said "Snake!" in a whisper.

"Why do you say that?" asked Delight, moved to confide in the shrewd looking little person near her.

"Because she *is* one. Do you know what I think?" suddenly asked Sanxay, coming nearer, as they walked along the solitary hall.

The two paused a moment, and the bright eyes of the dwarf looked up at his companion.

"I think," he went on, with emphasis, "I think *she* did it."

"So do I," with equal emphasis. As neither had spoken a name, it must be left to the reader to guess who was meant.

"But it can never be proved," said Delight, dejectedly. "Of course it's reasonable to think that such a thing couldn't have been done without Mercy's knowledge, and Julia will stick to the story she has already told."

"And that is?"

"That Mercy did it for a lark, although she advised against it."

"And Miss Anthony denies it?"

"Not yet; but I know her face; I know she was as shocked as we had been, when she looked in the glass."

"We'll get at the truth," said Sanxay, confidently.

"It can't be done; it's one of the cases where two people assert opposite things, and unfortunately the probability is against Mercy."

By this time they had traversed the main building and were in the wing where were the rooms of the two girls. They stopped at Mercy's door and Delight knocked. In a moment the door was opened, and the dim light in the hall revealed Mercy's figure. She failed to see Sanxay, who had fallen back a few steps.

"How are you?" asked Delight, taking both the girl's hands in her own.

A kind of shudder shook Mercy's frame, but she did not attempt to reply.

"We've brought you something," went on Delight, and now the dwarf came forward.

Mercy took the tray and said, "Thank you," standing in the door with it.

"I want to ask you one question," suddenly

said the boy, "Did you make yourself ridiculous for that last scene?"

"No."

"Did you know but that you looked all right?"

"No."

"I just wanted to ask you," remarked he, in a relieved tone. "Of course I knew you didn't. Now *I* am convinced about it, and the thing is to convince others."

Mercy did not reply. Delight saw that she looked pale and exhausted, and that her eyes were hideously swollen. She had been weeping her heart out there alone while the others had been feasting; that was why she seemed stupid and indifferent.

"Oh, Mercy!" suddenly exclaimed Delight, flinging her arms about her friend, to the great danger of the ice-cream and cake, "do you think I'm having a good time down there? I hate it all! I wish they were all at home where they belong! Everything is spoiled for me, now!"

This outburst from the usually calm Delight roused Mercy. She struggled to keep the

tray straight and to return Delight's embrace. The consequence was that cake and cream slid to the floor outside the threshold.

Sanxay uttered an exclamation, and said he didn't bring refreshments for such a use.

"I'm so much obliged to you," replied Mercy, "but I couldn't eat anything — I should choke," and a dry sob came with the last words.

"I say," he suddenly cried, "this thing isn't going to stop you from coming to my party, is it?"

Mercy gave another sob, and said, indistinctly:

"Of course it is! I wonder what they will do with me? I should deserve something awful if I could play such a mean trick."

The strictest investigation brought nothing to light. Mercy denied pointblank all knowledge of the change made in her appearance in that last scene of the play. Julia Bowers as pointedly persisted in the assertion she had first made,—that Mercy had done it for a lark. Of course things looked very dark for Mercy.

Madame repeated and varied her questions.

"You know it is unreasonable to think we can believe you did not even know that your wig was cut down the middle?" she said to Mercy.

"Yes, it is unreasonable," said the girl, dully.

Madame could not refrain from making a slight gesture of impatience. In spite of herself, her heart relented as she looked at the girl before her. Though her judgment went against her, some intuition was in her favour.

All the explanation Mercy could offer was that her mind was so taken up with her part that she didn't know what was done to her.

Julia told her story in a perfectly collected way and in these words:

"Just before it was time for Miss Anthony to go on the last time, she turned to me and said she would do something to make them stare; we would have a lark that was worth while. And then she said I must help her. I advised her not to do it, the play had gone on so well. But she was bound she would, and told me I might do as I pleased about helping her. She stepped to the glass, caught up the shears, and cut the wig, and I pinned up her

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train. We both laughed; we couldn't help it; but I was afraid. Then we had to go on. It all happened in a minute. I think the idea came to her suddenly, and she carried it out without reflecting."

Miss Bowers was questioned, but she held to her story.

"Where was the half of the wig put?"

"She threw it under the stand. She said if there had been time she would have had one eyebrow black and the other light."

The girls could not help smiling at the thought, and at the memory of how ludicrous Queen Mary had looked.

Mercy, hearing Julia's plausible words, had listened to her and looked at her with utter amazement upon her face.

When she had finished speaking the last time, she advanced a step toward her and asked, almost with awe at such falsehood:

"Do you believe what you are saying?"

"Certainly, I am telling the truth," was the glib response.

Madame did not check Mercy; she sat watching the two girls closely.

"I said to you that I was going to have a lark in that last scene?"

"Yes, you did."

"And I cut off the wig?"

"Yes, you did."

"And I said that about my eyebrows?"

"Yes, you did."

"Julia Bowers, have you always been able to lie as easily as this?"

There was an audible sensation at this question. The girls silently touched each other and exchanged glances.

Mercy was now thoroughly roused. Her head was upreared, and her eyes were ablaze.

"I am not lying; I am telling the truth," said Julia.

"Aren't you very sorry you were so wicked as to pin up my train?" asked Mercy.

"I am sorry I did that."

"Do you ever happen to tell the truth?"

"I always mean to tell the truth."

There was something in Mercy's distended eyes that at last made Julia a trifle uneasy. She wondered how long Mercy would be allowed to put her lawless questions. She found it a

great effort to keep her eyes fixed on Mercy's face, and she would not, for anything, lower her glance. She knew that Madame Delmont was looking at her, and that Delight Chantry was watching her closely. She began to be frightened, although she failed to see any chance by which her guilt could be brought home to her.

"Madame Delmont," suddenly cried Mercy, turning to that lady, with a confiding movement that was inexpressibly touching, "do you think I could have done such a thing? Do you think I could tell you a falsehood about it? Don't you believe what I say? Did I ever tell you an untruth?"

Madame did not reply instantly. Impulsively Delight moved nearer her friend.

"One of you must be telling an untruth," the lady said, at last, "and how am I to be sure which one it is? I do not know that either of you ever told me a falsehood. You must see for yourself that what Miss Bowers says is the most probable. It was bad enough that such a piece of mischief should be done, but it is worse that this lie should be told by one of my

girls. I am going to send you both to your rooms until noon, and I request that no one go near either of you. I want you to think over this matter, and I sincerely hope and believe that the one who has spoken falsehoods will confess. I will not allow myself to think that either of you can persist in such wickedness."

Madame rose. She was greatly depressed; she had no desire to go to the birthday celebration. She reproved herself for the wish she felt to turn to Mercy and take her in her arms. Not until the girl had confessed could she do so.

Could she be expected to believe that Mercy had not really known that her wig was mutilated in that way? Of course it was possible; but certainly Miss Bowers's story had all the air of probability. The principal felt weary and perplexed as she saw the girls leave the room. She turned to Miss Noyes and asked:

"What is your impression of all this? We have been mistaken in Mercy Anthony, I suppose? She is capable of playing an ugly trick

and then of telling a falsehood about it afterward?"

Miss Noyes roused herself from some absorbing thought. She could not recover from the chagrin which she felt from the ridicule which Mercy's trick had brought upon her play. How could she help believing that Mercy was guilty?

"There is very little doubt in my mind," she answered. "She has not, after all, as fine a nature as we had thought. It is very easy to misjudge one who has a manner which seems frank and generous."

These words, in Madame's mood, made an impression. She felt strongly that she was so predisposed in favour of Mercy that she might be unjust to Miss Bowers.

"Perhaps some confession will be made," she remarked, as she rose to leave the room.

When noon came, instead of sending for the girls, Madame decided to go to their rooms and see each alone.

Julia Bowers looked almost ill, so red were her cheeks, and so pale was she about the

mouth. Madame thought her eyes were sharper and brighter than ever.

Julia had evidently been lying on the bed. She opened the door for Madame, and offered her a chair.

But the lady only put her hands on the back of the chair, and asked, "Have you anything to say to me?"

"Nothing but the same things over again," was the reply.

"You are very sure of that? Remember that I shall consider your answer now as final."

"Yes, Madame, I am sure."

"I hope you are not ill? Shall I send you any medicine?"

"Thank you, no. I am only tired and worried."

Julia's lip quivered and her eyes filled. Madame was sorry for her; she recommended her to lie down, and then left her.

Mercy was evidently walking her room, for rapidly treading feet sounded from that direction, and the door was opened the instant Madame knocked.

The girl's face was tear-stained and pale, and she looked hopeless and weary.

"I hope you will own your fault to me now."

The principal's kind voice penetrated to the girl's heart. She pressed her clasped hands tightly together.

"I cannot! I cannot!" she exclaimed. "It was not my fault! I knew nothing about it!"

After a moment Madame replied: "Do you comprehend how everything is against you — how no one could know the circumstances and not believe that you at least knew what was done?"

"Yes, Madame, I comprehend."

"And you will not confess to me, Mercy?"

"It would be a lie to say I did know, when I did not."

"Unless this affair be cleared up, I do not see how, under the circumstances, I can allow you to remain here at school."

"You would expel me?" Mercy trembled as she spoke, but her eye was courageous.

To be expelled meant more to her than it would have meant to girls who had parents.

Her guardian's house had never been a pleasant home to her, although no one was really unkind. She was far happier here at school with her friend Delight than she had been since her mother died when she was a child. She felt instinctively that her guardian and his family would not find it very hard to believe ill of her.

"I do not know what other course I could take," said Madame. "But it would be very different if you would make confession. What you did was an unkindness to the author of the play; still, a childish impulse toward mischief might be pardoned. A persistency in evil, however, could not be."

Madame Delmont wondered if the girl knew how much it hurt her to speak those words. Mercy said nothing.

"To-morrow, before the pupils leave, I shall announce my decision," said Madame, and then she left the room, not trusting herself to look again at Mercy.

"There is something here which I fail to understand," she thought, as she went to her own apartments. She sent word shortly after

that the two girls were to remain in their rooms the rest of the day; they could neither of them go to the party. Julia had confessed sufficient complicity in the trick to justify her being forbidden to go also.

CHAPTER X.

DELIVERING THE LETTER.

THE pupils were to go to Little Hope down by the river side, and they had already started, convoyed by several teachers.

The carriage was waiting for Madame and the rest of the teachers, when Delight Chantry appeared at the principal's door. She was breathless and flushed.

"I thought you had gone," said Madame, in surprise.

"I did start; but I don't wish to go."

"Not wish to go!"

"No, Madame. I'd rather stay here. And if you would please let me just go to Mercy's door and tell her I am not gone to the party?"

"So you stay at home for your friend's sake?"

"You see, it wouldn't be any pleasure to

me, knowing she is shut up here; and then it might be a comfort to her to know I was near her."

Delight spoke sadly, and with no animation.

Madame felt that she had never had an affair to deal with which puzzled and distressed her so much. She did not hesitate about giving her consent to Delight.

Sanxay Ranier's party was a great success. Never were grounds so lovely, flowers so beautiful and sweet; never were cake, cream, sherbet, so delicious; never were plays so inspiring and entertaining.

"Where are Miss Anthony and Miss Chantry?" asked Sanxay, when he had seen every one, and had come back to Madame, who stood with his mother under a grape arbour.

He was soon told.

"They are the nicest girls in the Institute," he said, with emphasis. "I wouldn't have given the party if I had known they were not to be here."

"Sanxay!" said his mother, reprovingly.

"Fact, though, and why can't I say it?"

Meanwhile, at the Institute, whose windows and doors were open to the sweet, warm air, Delight was sitting on the floor by the door of Mercy's room. She had a book in her hand.

"You ought to have gone to the party," said Mercy from behind the door. "It's a shame for you to be here."

"I'd rather be here; so don't make any moan about that," was the response.

A long silence would follow, and then Mercy would again remonstrate with her for having remained, and add, "But it's such a comfort to have you here."

So the long afternoon and twilight at length passed.

A servant came up and brought their supper. Finally, Delight went to her own room opposite Mercy's, and then, after what seemed an age, the girls were heard coming back, laughing, talking, and singing.

At last the whole building was quiet. Mercy lay on the outside of her bed, for she had not taken off her dress. She was sleeping profoundly.

When the next morning dawned, everybody felt as if something unusual were about to happen.

"I shall have to expel her," was Madame's first thought. "For the sake of the rest, I cannot allow such a thing to go unpunished, and there is no reasonable chance that she is not guilty. I am letting my feelings influence me too much."

After breakfast there was all the bustle of approaching departures. The piazza was full of trunks; already long "depot wagons" were driving up to take girls to the earlier trains. Madame was as busy as she could be, when a servant came to her and gave a message.

"I think Miss Bowers is sick. I took her breakfast to her, and she couldn't eat it; she don't look right."

It was soon discovered that the servant's opinion was correct. Madame found Julia with every symptom of fever, and she despatched Larry to Mill Village for the doctor who usually attended the pupils.

"It's a fever; what kind I cannot tell until to-morrow," was the doctor's decision. "In the

meantime it will be as well not to allow any of the girls to go to her room."

"Shall I send to her parents?"

"Not yet. It's a good thing the pupils are packing off. They'll go to-day, won't they?"

"Yes, except two or three who remain here through vacation."

"I will see that she has proper care until you come again," said Madame, and prepared to sit with the sick girl, who, as the hours went by, seemed very ill indeed, lying and moaning, with eyes half closed.

Madame sent to say that she would see Mercy Anthony as soon as she was released from her care of Julia.

It was one of Madame Delmont's characteristics that she never thought of herself when any of her pupils were ill. They were as sure of gentle and thorough care as if they had been at home.

Several times during the next few hours Madame was called out to say good-bye to groups of girls who were just starting for different trains, and by the middle of the afternoon there were but six girls left in the Insti-

tute. Three of them were to stay through the vacation, and the others were Julia, Mercy, and Delight. The latter lived only about two hours' ride in the steam cars from Mill Village, and she had taken upon herself the responsibility of deciding to remain over until the next day. She was even meditating the propriety of sending a telegram to her mother.

She was sitting on her trunk in her room, having put the last thing beneath the lid, and was looking desolately about her, when the door was suddenly opened without a previous knock, and some one entered precipitately. Delight felt her neck imprisoned by two arms, and she heard Mercy's voice saying between sobs:

"It's all over! It's all over!"

As soon as she could, Delight asked:

"What do you mean? Please remember that I can't breathe if I am choked to death! What's all over?"

"*I* am all over! There's an end of me as far as Holden Mountain Institute is concerned. That is what I mean!"

Mercy released Delight sufficiently to enable

the latter to sit up, and Mercy sat down beside her. The girl's cheeks were crimson, and there were tears upon them.

"You are not expelled?" questioned Delight.

"I am. I am to start for home by the seven o'clock train to-morrow morning. I am to take a letter to my guardian. Don't you envy me?"

Delight jumped up from her trunk.

"I am going to Madame!" she exclaimed.

Mercy caught hold of her dress, and said, quickly:

"No, you won't, either! There's no use in it. Madame has just left me. How can you blame her? There's nothing else for her to do, and I really believe she hated to do it. She explained that, mean as the trick was, she didn't expel me for that, but for persisting in saying I knew nothing about it." Mercy sprang to her feet and flung out her hands with unconscious dramatic gesture, as she cried, "But I didn't know it! I knew nothing about it! I'm the victim of circumstances," and she laughed hysterically, and then began to sob violently.

"I'm not going to stand this!" said Delight, with determination.

She pushed Mercy gently on to the bed, then left the room and sought Madame, who, very much wearied, was lying on the lounge in her parlour.

But it was of no use, as Mercy had predicted; for Madame was convinced she had done the only thing left for her to do, and she was as firm as she was gentle. She listened kindly and with sympathy, but Delight was obliged to leave her without having won any concession.

"If I am mistaken, no one can be so sorry as I shall be," she said, "but I must act according to my judgment."

And so it was decided. Delight went back sadly. She felt rebellious. How could she return to the Institute and not find Mercy? And she knew that Mercy had no pleasant home, although it was a luxurious one.

"It's no use," she said, drearily, shutting her door and putting her back against it, looking at the figure on the bed.

"I told you so," was the response, in a muffled voice. "And now I don't care what

becomes of me. I shall have a horrid time all through vacation, and then be sent to some dreadful school at the end of it. And you won't be there! If I were a heroine I'd blow out my brains!"

"Heroines don't do that; it isn't ladylike," said Delight, gravely. "It's only heroes who take it for granted they have brains to blow out."

"That's such an old joke," said Mercy, smiling feebly.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," cried Delight, brightening visibly. "I'll get my mother to invite you to spend your vacation with me. Something will happen in all that time to make things better. You know my folks are farmers. Oh, we'll have a jolly time!"

Mercy got off the bed and hugged her friend. Her eyes danced.

"There never was such a Trombone as my Trombone," she cried.

But her gaiety faded away when she really was ready to start home with the dreadful message in her pocket; for Madame chose to send the letter by Mercy.

Delight was to go in an opposite direction two hours later.

The only bright spot ahead to Mercy was the knowledge that Delight's invitation was to come in the course of a few days; but then there was the uncertainty as to whether she would be allowed to accept it. The letter which she had to deliver was not a very good preparative, she knew, toward any favours.

She was obliged to ride in the cars until two o'clock in the afternoon, and she was tired and cross when she reached the large inland city where her home was situated.

There was no one to meet her; indeed, it had not been known at what time she was coming, so she walked alone the short distance from the station to her home.

She mounted the marble steps and rang the bell, feeling a great inclination to turn and run away. The door was opened by Lily Benedict, her guardian's daughter, a girl of about twenty.

"Oh, Mercy, is that you? How de do?" said Miss Lily, and gave her a little dab on the cheek, which was supposed to be a kiss.

Mercy walked in, and met Mrs. Benedict at the drawing-room door. From her she received another dab, and the remark:

"How tanned you are, Mercy."

"Yes, ma'am," said Mercy, demurely, "I shall have to be enamelled the first thing."

Lily gave a short laugh, and said:

"How odd you are, Mercy! But if I were you I believe I *would* be enamelled!"

"Is Uncle Benedict at home?" asked Mercy.

Mr. Benedict was a distant cousin, and she had been taught to call him uncle.

"Yes, he's in the library," answered Lily.

Mercy set down her little hand-bag in the hall and went toward the library. Much as she dreaded delivering the letter, she could not rest until she had done it.

Mr. Benedict looked surprised when, in answer to his "Come in," there entered — his ward.

He put down his book, rose, and shook hands with her. He was a pale, thin man, much given to reading.

"I have a letter for you, sir," said Mercy, now very pale herself. She handed the envel-

ope, and added, in an uncertain voice: "The sooner you know it, the better. I am expelled from the school."

She sat down quickly, not feeling quite able to stand.

Mr. Benedict read the letter, frowning deeply. He was trying to forget the book he had been reading, and to put his mind on this matter. His first thought was the trouble he should have in hunting up another school; his second was that he would make his wife do it. But it was proper to be displeased, of course.

"This is very bad, very bad," he said, looking up at the girl. "I am surprised. Lily never was expelled. It's really a disgrace. Go and tell your aunt about it."

Mercy rose.

"If you please," she said, "I wish you would tell her. I don't think I could tell any more people."

"Very well, then."

Mercy knew she was to leave the room now, and she hurried up to her own chamber, and Mr. Benedict would probably have forgotten

the news, had he not seen the open letter on his table when he rose to go down to supper.

He took the epistle and gave it to his wife, who had no book to distract her attention from it, and who talked all through supper-time upon the subject, asking Mercy innumerable questions, wondering at her wickedness, until she felt nearly wild with it all. She said there was some mistake; she was not guilty, but things were against her; to which Lily said that of course Madame Delmont knew what she was doing.

On the third day from that came a letter from Delight enclosing a note of invitation from her mother to Mercy, asking the girl to spend the vacation with Delight.

"It is out of the question," said Mrs. Benedict, decidedly. "She has been expelled from the school, and she must not be sent off to have a good time, after such misbehaviour."

So Mrs. Benedict wrote a dignified note to Mrs. Chantry, and Mercy wrote a despairing one to Delight, and they were sent off by the next mail.

CHAPTER XI.

A SURPRISE.

IT was four days after having received that sorrowful letter from Mercy that Delight was starting away from the store at the village which was two miles from her home. She had come down to the post-office, and to do a few errands, and she was mounted on her father's old horse, "Bayside."

She heard the sound of wheels approaching from behind her, but she was looking over the letters and papers she had received at the office, and wishing there had been something from Mercy, when the wheels stopped and a voice called her name.

She turned around so quickly as almost to fall from her horse.

The "depot wagon," which came up regularly to the village from the station five miles away, had been stopped just after it reached

the store where it had delivered the mail, and so Delight had missed seeing it.

The voice which had called had said:

"Delight! Delight Chantry! Wait for me!"

The speaker was Mercy Anthony, who had been brought up from the station, and had expected to be taken two miles farther on, to Mr. Chantry's house.

"Don't get out!" cried Delight, as soon as her surprise would allow her to speak. "They'll take you home, and you see I can't have you go with me."

Mercy, however, had begun to emerge. The sides of the vehicle were rolled up, but there rose a wooden panel about twelve inches from the body of the carriage, which one who essayed to escape that way must step over, and then grope blindly with the foot for some resting-place for that member, hanging on, meanwhile, somehow on the inside. If the driver would get out, one might climb over the front seat, but there was a constitutional indisposition on the part of the driver to leave his perch, and he had not left it now.

Mercy was in that stage of escape when one foot was out and groping.

"Don't tell me not to get out!" exclaimed Mercy. "You must see I can't! Do you know whether this is a Black Maria which I'm in?"

"What do ye want ter git out for?" asked the driver, looking calmly over his shoulder at her.

Mercy did not think of attempting to reply. She had deposited her satchel on the floor of the carriage that she might have the entire use of both hands; and now her youth and agility stood her in good stead. She crept out of the opening which should have been a door but was not, she stood with both feet planted on the wheel, then she jumped to the ground.

She turned her flushed face toward the now admiring driver.

"Please take my trunk and bag on to Mr. Chantry's."

Then she turned to Delight, whose face was bright with pleasure, though she said, again:

"But you should have gone on with Mr. Loomis. What's going to become of you

now? Oh, but isn't it just splendid that you've come?"

Delight had hung her bridle on the pommel, and was just going to slip to the ground, when Mercy stopped her by saying:

"What are you doing? Don't get off! I'm going to mount up there behind you. After being able to get out of that cart, I know I can do anything. Come up to a fence somewhere, and I'll climb on."

"But do you know how to ride?" questioned Delight.

"Not an atom. But I know how to put my arms around you, and pull you off if I feel myself going."

Mercy was in the highest of spirits, and it was not many minutes before she had infected her companion with her gaiety. Delight's surprise and joy at seeing her friend were enough to make her gay. But there was always a peculiarly infectious quality about Mercy's good spirits, and now she was hilarious.

Delight guided Bayside to the most convenient rail fence, and Mercy clambered from

it on his back, sitting in the old-fashioned way, her arms about her friend.

"I must have this steed walk every step of the way home," remarked Delight, as he stepped deliberately forth, "for his trot is about as easy as an elephant's gait. But I'm used to the pounding he gives one."

"And I mean to become used to it," declared Mercy. "Now this is glorious! This is life!"

"Bayside and I have had remarkably good times," responded Delight, "and now," turning around as far as possible, "tell me what this means. I no sooner have a letter saying you are to be kept home as punishment for being expelled, than here you are! Is it a joke? I should think so, only that a note from Mrs. Benedict makes that impossible. You've come to stay, haven't you? You are not going to fly off?"

"Oh, yes, I've come to stay. You'll get tired enough of me. I'm going to stick like a burr. Go on, old Bayside, let's have a canter!" and the girl drummed her heels against the horse's side, though the animal

minded it not in the least, still keeping to his deliberate walk.

"Perhaps you wear spurs, Delight," she went on; "if you do, please put a few inches of them into this charger."

"No, indeed; I'm not going to have us both bounced off into the dust; I think of that fine new frock of yours. It's too fine to travel in."

"I know it; but I *would* wear it. Sometimes I do insist upon spending a little of my own money."

"You have a great deal, haven't you?" asked Delight, who had not a penny, and hardly expected ever to have one.

"Yes, I'm rather rich," was the complacent reply.

"How rich?"

"I'm going to have eighty thousand dollars when I'm twenty-one."

"Mercy!"

"Is that an exclamation, or are you speaking to me?"

"I am just lost in admiration of myself that I have a girl, who is worth all that money, on the horse behind me."

"Yes; you'd better make much of me, I can tell you, or when I come into my property I'll cut you!"

"Yes, that I will. I'll toady to you with all my might. I'll just be your slave."

"That's right. But I sha'n't have my wealth for years, and at present I'm only allowed a little mean, stingy pocket money."

"I hope your guardian is honest," Delight said, gravely.

"Yes, I think he's disagreeable enough to be honest; but he can't harm me, for my fortune is tied up safely; I remember my mother said that. Gracious!" with a sudden change of mood, "*can't* this horse move out of a walk?" drumming her heels again.

"Yes; by perseverance I can make him trot, but I'm not going to try it," replied Delight, decisively. "*I* know what his trot is, and I know you'd pull me off in your struggle to keep on. Now tell me how it happened that you were allowed to come."

"That's easy enough to understand," said Mercy. "When Aunt Benedict wrote to decline, they expected to stay at home through

the summer. Three days later they suddenly decided to go to Newport. They didn't want me with them, and they couldn't put me on board wages as they do their servants. They found it convenient to change their minds about me. I was told that, on the whole, they thought it best to allow me to make the proposed visit to my friend. You may believe my heart jumped at that. There was no time to send a letter, and I remembered you said it took from three to four days for a telegram to be brought from the car station. I suppose that driver delivers it?"

"Yes, he does if he thinks of it; but if he hasn't any errand up our way, he waits until he happens to see one of us at the village."

"Yes, I should think he would. Well, I didn't send a telegram, and here I am. How many miles an hour can this horse walk?"

"Three; and as it is only two miles from the village to my home, we shall get there in less than an hour."

"I am fearfully, enormously hungry!" was the next remark, accompanied by a violent squeeze around the waist she held.

Before Delight could make any response to these words, Mercy asked:

"Have you heard anything from the Institute?"

"No."

"Was Julia Bowers very sick?"

"I don't know."

The two girls were silent now for some time, and both were thinking of the events which occurred just before the vacation began, and that was not quite a week ago, although in some ways it seemed so long.

Soon they reached the top of a long hill from which could be seen an old farmhouse with barns and sheds. A pasture lay back of the buildings, and a lane led to it. In the lane were several cows and sheep; behind them, and a great ways behind, sauntered a boy of eleven or twelve. He had on brown "overalls," upheld by one strap that passed from his left side in the back to his right side in the front, thus making two straps seem an extravagance. He wore a blue and white checked gingham shirt, and an enormous straw hat, with its brim turned up sharply behind, and giving

that peculiar appearance to the wearer which that and that only will give, and which is rarely, if ever, seen anywhere but in the country. This was his entire costume, for he had on no shoes.

When he saw Bayside and his burden outlined against the sky on the top of the hill, he incontinently set the cows into a gallop, that he himself might get home the quicker, and he was standing by the roadside in front of the house when Delight and her visitor rode in at the gate. He stood calmly with his hands deep in his pockets, maintaining his position within about six inches of where the horse would naturally walk, and looking up all the while with a gaze that completely ignored his sister, and dwelt exclusively upon the stranger.

It was a shrewd face thus upturned, extremely freckled, with well-opened blue eyes, a wide mouth, and rather turned-up nose. Withal it bore a curious resemblance to Delight.

"Who's that?" whispered Mercy in Delight's right ear. Instead of replying, the girl said:

"Why don't you take off your hat, Heartsease?"

"Why?" turning and walking by the horse, and still continuing to look at the newcomer.

"Because here's a young lady, to say nothing of your sister," was the response.

The boy did not answer at all to this; he thrust his hands still farther into his pockets, kicked a pebble, hitting it accurately with his right large toe.

In a moment more Bayside had been guided to a horse-block which stood near the back porch of the house, and the boy who had been called Heartsease withdrew his hands with a great show of alacrity from his pockets, and sprang to Bayside's bridle, which he held with a firm clasp.

"Be sure the horse is kept from running away, or I never shall dare to get down!" cried Mercy, in a shrill voice, gradually slipping off, until her feet rested on the block.

The boy grinned.

"I'll give anybody ten thousand dollars who will make him run away!" he said, emphatically.

Having touched the block, Mercy leaped to

the ground with an agility that was approved by Heartsease, and also apparently unexpected by him.

Delight immediately followed her friend, and Heartsease turned the horse with his head toward the barn, put his hands instantly back in his pockets, and uttered a series of loud and explosive "clucks" directed at the horse, which leisurely strode on to the stable.

"Miss Anthony, this is my brother, Henry Hazelton Chantry," said Delight, when she had gathered up the long skirt which she magnificently called her "habit."

Mercy executed a curtsey which would have been appropriate to the Scottish queen, and the boy, obedient to a nudge from his sister, pulled off his hat, and, blushing deeply, bowed even lower than the girl had done.

Raising himself upright, he turned to Delight, and said, briefly:

"Nobody at home, and nothing to eat."

"Oh," cried Mercy, despairingly, "and I am starving!"

"Sorry for you; but I believe there *is* a pail of chicken dough in the hen-house," he said.

"Stop your nonsense!" said Delight, authoritatively. "Where's mother?"

"They came for her a few minutes after you went," replied the boy, "to take her over to the Blake place, where they are sick, and poor as poverty all the time, you know. They wanted her to bring what she had cooked in the house, and she took all the bread and doughnuts, and the rest of the chicken. Mother said she'd be home before this, and we'd have griddle-cakes for supper. But they'll keep her to take care of the baby if they can."

Delight was really vexed.

"There was almost a whole pie left over from dinner," she said; "where is it?"

"I was faint, and I ate that," said Henry Hazelton.

Mercy began to laugh.

"Don't laugh!" exclaimed Delight. "You are to have nothing but crackers and cheese, as far as I can see. And when father and the men come home from the East Meadow they'll be hungry, too."

The three stood on the porch. The boy was looking intently at his dusty toes, and was

evidently trying to come to a decision. He raised his eyes just as his sister had turned to enter the house.

"Hold on a minute, 'Light!" he exclaimed. "I went down to Archer's Pond this afternoon, and caught ten pickerel. I meant to roast 'em in my hut to-morrow, but let's fry 'em now! And you make some sort of a cake on top of the stove. I'm kind of hungry myself."

"What a noble boy you are!" cried Mercy, looking at him with dancing eyes, while he smiled approval of her sentiment. "You go and skin or bone or split the fish, while I help Delight make the cake."

"Much you know about it, with that gown on!" He turned away, adding to himself, "And I guess I will skin or bone or split the fish! She's a regular one, she is; and I'll bet she's about the right kind of a girl."

Mercy was presented with an enormous apron by Delight, who had soon slipped off her riding-skirt.

"You'll have to wear your red flannel boating-dress most of the time here," said Delight. "I hope it's in your trunk."

"Yes; I remembered you said there was a pond here. I suppose the man will bring the trunk?"

"Oh, yes; in time."

"That's a comfort. If it doesn't ever come, you can lend me somebody's petticoat and short gown."

Delight was mixing flour and milk and baking-powder for her cake, and Mercy was savagely slicing large pieces from a thick chunk of salt fat pork, for the fish frying.

"Why do you call your brother Heartsease?" she asked.

"Because he has always been such a torment. From the time he was a little tot two or three years old, he was continually getting into scrapes, and frightening mother for fear he would break his neck or some other part of his frame. And as he grew older it was just as bad. One day father came and found mother was just pulling Henry by the heels from the hogshead of rain-water, which stands out there at the corner of the house. He had climbed up on a stool, with the cat in his arms, to baptise her, as he said. He was five

years old then, and if mother hadn't seen him at just that minute he never would have been any older in this world. Father and mother worked over him, and put on dry clothes, and talked as plainly as they could, but I suppose they were too grateful that he wasn't drowned to be very severe. Mother said that night that he was such an anxiety that she never had an hour's peace, and father laughed and said he was a 'regular heartsease,' and the name was so ridiculous we've called him so. I say now," suddenly looking at Mercy, "please *don't* cut any more pork, unless you particularly want it yourself. There's enough to fry a small barrel of fish."

A voice at the open door called attention to Heartsease, who stood with his fish on a tin plate ready for cooking.

"When I cut the pork," remarked Mercy, "I was thinking of you, Henry Hazelton, and how faint you were."

"Well, I *am* hungry," he said, taking up a fork with which he began to spear the fish into the frying-pan.

Mercy prattled on gaily, as she rolled the

fish in Indian meal. Were there not yet weeks of vacation to be spent with Delight?

"Take me to the pond," she said, "and I'll catch larger fish than any of these."

"*You* catch fish!" the boy replied, contemptuously. "I should like to see you do it! You couldn't put your bait on, and if you did pull in a fish I s'pose you'd screech when you saw it wriggling on the hook!"

Mercy turned upon him.

"Young man," she cried, "what kind of girls do you know? You must have chosen your society in a very poor way."

The boy nodded his head toward his sister.

"She's about all I know, and she's enough to keep a whole pond full of fish from biting."

Delight, who was spatting her cake down on the "spider" with the palm of her hand, said, without looking around:

"Stop talking, Heartsease."

"Oh, let him go on," interposed Mercy, with an oblique glance at the boy, "nobody minds what he says."

Heartsease turned, and with ostentatious deliberateness walked out-of-doors.

"I hope we haven't hurt his feelings," said Mercy, as she carefully put the fish in the hot fat, and then sprang back, as a scalding drop jumped up in her face.

"His feelings!" repeated Delight. "He is a regular rhinoceros, he is."

"Still," remarked Mercy, dabbing her burned cheek with her pocket-handkerchief, "I've heard somewhere that boys had feelings, 'hidden beneath a proud and rough exterior.' I've certainly seen that in print."

"It's a mistake, then," replied Delight. "They have two feelings: one is to be hungry, and the other is to be sleepy; but there's a third, — to be lazy. Miss Anthony, will you turn the fish?"

Miss Anthony did as she was requested, while Delight put the tea to steep, and hurriedly began to lay the cloth on the table which stood at the farther end of the long kitchen.

"You will see," she said, while Mercy stood guard over the frying fish, "you will see that my brother is not so hurt but he will return to his supper. If he did not, I should certainly be alarmed about him."

The preparations for supper went on with celerity, and, under Delight's instructions, fish and cake came on to the table a proper brown. As she was pouring out the tea her brother entered bearing a pail.

"Thought we should need some fresh water," he said.

"We were so afraid you might forget it was supper-time," said Delight, with great sarcasm.

"You needn't ever be anxious on that account about me," replied Heartsease, drawing up his chair.

The devouring of the supper went on gaily. Mercy declared she had never been so happy in her life. They arranged to go boating and berrying; there was even talk of climbing up Bald Hill, although Henry Hazelton declared positively that no girl could climb that hill, it was so steep and rocky.

"Can you climb it?" asked Mercy.

"Of course."

"Then I can, and I will," was the response.

Heartsease looked down sneeringly at her dress, much furbelowed as to the skirt.

"You surely can't do it in that gown!" he

said, and then he laughed, and added, "I should like to see you trying it with that thing on!"

"But you won't, though! I'm not such an idiot as that, if I *am* a girl!" said Mercy. "You just wait until my trunk comes!"

"Is old Loomis going to bring it?" asked Heartsease.

"Mr. Loomis is to bring it," reprovingly said his sister.

"Then I guess I shall have to wait," said the boy.

But even as he spoke there was the sound of wheels in the yard, together with a vociferous "Whoa!"

"There he is now!" cried Heartsease, and he ran out on the porch.

"Ain't there no man round here?" asked Mr. Loomis.

"No one but me," answered the boy, who had his hands already in his pockets.

"Then there ain't much show," was the response. "I s'pose you ain't big enough to stiddy this trunk, be ye?"

This remark called the hands of Heartsease out of his pockets, as it was meant to do.

The trunk was lifted and "stiddied" on to the piazza, the hand-bag deposited by it, and then Mr. Loomis drove away.

The two girls and the boy managed to get the trunk up the stairs to the room which was to be Mercy's, and by that time it was sunset, and Mercy heard again the sound of wheels, and, looking out of the window, she saw that an open wagon was directly beneath her, and that a tall woman, whose face was hidden by a deep sunbonnet, was alighting.

"That must be Delight's mother," thought Mercy, and in a moment she heard her friend calling her from the foot of the stairs. Mercy, having smoothed her hair, hurried down, and was presented to Mrs. Chantry, who took both her hands in a warm clasp, and bade her welcome so heartily that the girl could have wept from sheer thankfulness.

Mrs. Chantry, in spite of her unfashionable dress, had a manner that was at once so polite and so sincere that Mercy thought she had never seen a fine city lady who was so much of a gentlewoman.

CHAPTER XII.

BAYSIDE TROTS.

THE next day the two girls with their own hands harnessed Bayside into an open wagon, and drove down to the post-office.

Heartsease, idling about the barnyard, felt a sudden inclination to go with them, and he ran and jumped up behind, and sat with his feet swinging out, trying to hear what they said, and quite sure neither of them had heard him get into the wagon.

Very soon Mercy, in a voice to be heard above the rumbling of the wheels, remarked:

"What a bright boy your brother is, Delight!"

"Do you think so?"

"Of course. I only wish I had such a brother," and the speaker sighed heavily.

Her companion did not reply, and Mercy went on:

"I've been waiting ever since I came for him to invite me to go to Archer's Pond with him. I cannot die happy until I have been to Archer's Pond, and there is no one in this world with whom I wish to go as I wish to go with Henry Hazelton Chantry."

"If I felt like that I should certainly ask him," said Delight, in a voice much hoarser than usual.

Mercy sighed more violently than before, and replied:

"Oh, no, I can't do that. It would not be ladylike."

"I don't know what is to be done, then," said Delight, "for my brother is so constituted that if I ask him to do anything, even if it be something he likes, he instantly feels as if he didn't want to do it."

"That is on account of his noble disposition," said Mercy. "You don't ask him to do great things suitable to a boy like him."

Here there was a sound from the rear of the wagon as of a laugh suddenly choked back, which produced a gurgling noise. But the girls stared persistently forward.

Soon Mercy said, mournfully:

"I always knew there was a lack in my life, but until I came here I didn't realise it was owing to the fact that I had no brother like yours, Delight."

Here there was an unmistakable explosion from the back of the wagon.

Both girls looked around with great surprise pictured on their faces.

"You there!" cried Delight.

"You there!" cried Mercy.

"Oh, Guy! Yes, I'm here," replied the boy, and then he shouted with laughter, drew in his legs, and tossed them in the air in the exuberance of his delight.

"I hope you're not having a convulsion," said Delight.

"Yes, I am, too. How powerful lucky that you didn't know I was here! I don't believe that saying about listeners not hearing any good of themselves," and he looked sharply at Mercy, who now began to laugh as uproariously as the boy had done. As soon as comparative quiet had been restored, Heartsease said:

"If it's a cloudy day for fish to-morrow, let's all go to Archer's."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Mercy, effusively.

"And let's take lunch, and if we catch any fish let's cook 'em by a fire on the shore."

Mercy clapped her hands.

"If I only had a brother!" she cried.

"You'd want him just like 'Light's brother, wouldn't you?" questioned the boy.

"Exactly. I wouldn't have a freckle changed."

"I knew it. And if I had another sister —"

Mercy reached over and put her hand on Henry's mouth.

"I wasn't going to say anything," he said, calmly, when he could speak.

When they reached the post-office Heartsease jumped down and went into the office, returning with the announcement that the mail by mistake had been carried to Ryan, and the Ryan mail had been left there.

The change would not be made before nine o'clock in the evening. So they turned homeward, Heartsease insisting upon sitting on the seat between the two girls, and driving.

"'Light doesn't know how to drive this horse," he said. "I'll just show you what Bayside is made of. He used to be a trotter, and win, too."

"But that was twenty years ago," said Delight. "Don't you get him to going! The harness won't stand it; it'll break!"

"How silly you are!" responded the brother. "The harness is good enough."

"Can he really go?" asked Mercy, secretly wishing Heartsease would persist.

"Go? Yes, he can. Now you be still, 'Light. I can manage him."

The boy took out the whip, gathered up the lines, and continued to whip and cluck and shake the reins for some minutes. At last the old horse began to arouse himself, but it is probable he would have subsided again, if another horse in a light buggy had not just then come up behind. Now Bayside was thoroughly wakened. He settled down toward the ground, and began to take long, rapid strides that left his rival instantly in the rear.

It was in vain that the man behind whipped

up his steed. Mercy looked around. She began to feel the exhilaration which all know who have ridden behind a fast horse. It is a very different sensation from that which comes from going fast by means of steam.

"He's gaining, Heartsease! Look out, he'll catch up!" cried she, turning around again, and seeing that the horse in the rear was making better time.

"No, he can't catch up," replied the boy. "I know who it is; it's Deacon Cobb, and he ought to know his colt is no match for Bayside. Go on, old feller!"

But Bayside needed no urging now. Memories of his younger days came back to him as his old limbs grew less and less stiff.

Mercy clapped her hands. Her hat flew off and hung on the back of her head.

"This is glorious! This is fun!" she exclaimed.

Delight was getting excited, also, but her knowledge and caution were greater than her friend's.

"It won't be so glorious if the harness

breaks somewhere," she said. "Henry, *please* stop the horse before we begin to go down Ridge Hill."

"All right."

"But you probably can't do it," added Delight, knowing that such a suggestion would rouse her brother into trying to prove that he could.

"Can't I?" he asked, "you just see."

The old horse was under great headway now, and was clearing the ground in a wonderful way. But, though thoroughly aroused, Bayside was too old to keep up speed long. He began to slacken of his own accord, when the other horse was so far behind that he could not be heard. And now the top of Ridge Hill was reached.

"You'd better let me drive," Delight could not refrain saying. It was a very unfortunate remark.

"I guess not," said Heartsease, in a disagreeable tone. "I guess I can drive as well as any girl can!" and he slapped the lines violently, to prove that he could do as he said.

The awakened animal, resenting this indignity, tossed its head and started down the hill at a rate which, for such a road, was really frightful.

"Now you have done it!" said Delight, feeling as she spoke as if she would like to fling the boy out. But the next moment every feeling was absorbed in the breathless way in which they seemed to be going through the air. The front wheels were most of the time literally off the ground.

Heartsease braced his feet against the front of the wagon; the two girls grasped the sides of the seat. At every breath they drew they had a sensation as if they could not keep in the carriage another moment. All three faces were white, their eyes set and glaring.

It mattered not now in the least who held the reins, or whether any one held them.

Half-way down there was a break in the descent of the hill, where, for a few rods, was a comparatively level space.

Here the old horse began to flag, then stumbled and fell forward on its knees, and all three on the seat pitched forward out of the

wagon, Mercy rolling directly onto the horse and rebounding into the dust of the road.

She did not know in the least where the others were, but she thought she heard a sharp cry as she was rolling from the horse.

Her mouth and eyes were full of dust. Although it really was but an instant of time, it seemed to her several moments before she scrambled to her feet and found that she had the use of all her limbs. Turning to discover the fate of her companions, she saw Delight getting on her feet on the other side of the road, and Bayside rising also, after two ineffectual attempts, though he made no movement to go on.

"Where is Henry?" was Delight's question, after the two girls had glanced at each other.

"I don't know."

Here a moan from under the front part of the carriage was heard, and then both girls saw a dusty heap lying there.

Delight and Mercy immediately went down on their knees beside it.

"Can't you get up?" they asked.

Another moan was the answer. Mercy rose

and took Bayside's bridle, leading him forward a few steps, thus leaving Heartsease free to be assisted to his feet, unimpeded by the wheels.

"Something's broke in me," said the boy.

"Can't you tell whether it's your back, or your arm, or your leg?" asked Delight, who felt hysterically inclined, as she found that no one had been killed outright.

"I think it's all three," was the answer. "I'm going to try to get up and see," and he managed to stand up. It was very soon discovered that his left arm was broken about half-way between the wrist and elbow.

In another moment Mercy had torn the long, streaming gauze veil from her hat, and knotted it about the boy's neck, making a rest for his arm.

He was assisted into the wagon, and the three drove homeward, now at a very slow pace.

"Father will take the colt and go after the doctor," said Delight, "and we should be thankful we are not, all three of us, a mass of broken bones."

Heartsease groaned.

"We can't go to Archer's Pond to-morrow," he said.

"But we can go very soon," cheerfully observed Mercy, "and I can take you out; I can manage a boat quite well."

"*You* manage a boat!" with lofty, masculine scorn.

"I guess your arm isn't very bad," sagely remarked his sister, and he replied by an exaggerated groan.

On reaching home, they found that a man from Ryan had been there half an hour before, and left a telegram directed to Miss Mercy Anthony, care of Mr. Chantry. It was from Madame Delmont, who had been informed by a note from Delight that her friend was with her.

The message read as follows:

"Miss Bowers very ill; she wishes to see Mercy Anthony."

While Mr. Chantry was harnessing the colt to go for the doctor to set his son's arm, the two girls read this telegram.

"I suppose I must go," said Mercy, looking at Mrs. Chantry, who had put Heartsease on the lounge.

Mercy was very much startled, not to say a little frightened, by this sudden summons. She begged permission from Mrs. Chantry for Delight to go with her to the Institute.

The large school building had a desolate air with its rows of closed blinds and its deserted piazzas.

The two friends were shown into Madame's parlour. Everything was strange and still. How long ago the exhibition seemed!

Madame Delmont entered, looking pale and worn.

"You will go down to the dining-room, and have your dinner," she said, after she had greeted the girls. "Julia is asleep now. I will let you know when she wakens."

It was in the middle of the afternoon before Mercy was summoned.

Her heart beat painfully as she followed Madame into Julia's room, and she felt a choking sensation, as she saw how altered was the face lying on the pillow.

As she noticed those pinched and suffering features, Mercy's generous heart immediately

forgave the girl for what she had done. An expression of thankfulness came to Julia's countenance as she saw Mercy.

"Do you wish to see her alone?" asked Julia's mother, who sat by her bed.

"No; you and Madame stay," was the answer, in the weakest of voices.

Mercy came and bent over the bed, and Julia said, eagerly, but with piteous weakness:

"I couldn't get well, and I couldn't die until I had told you that it was I who fixed you up so ridiculously when you were Queen Mary. I was sure you didn't know what I was doing. I had a spite against you. There, now, it is out. You needn't be expelled. Madame, you hear?"

The effort to speak had dreadfully exhausted the girl. She closed her eyes, and Madame gently put Mercy out of the room, while Mrs. Bowers hastened to give her daughter a few drops of stimulating medicine.

Mercy sought Delight, who waited for her in the hall, and as soon as she saw the grave and anxious face of her friend she lost the control she had held over herself by Julia's bedside.

She threw her arms around Delight's neck, and sobbed.

"She said she did it!—and she's going to die, surely!"

Delight, much moved herself, yet managed to be calm enough to soothe Mercy, who trembled and cried to her heart's content. She led her down the hall, far away from Julia's room.

"She's going to die!" repeated Mercy, at last raising her tear-stained face, and then immediately covering it with her handkerchief.

"You needn't be so sure of that," said Delight. "Madame told me that, although she was extremely ill, she was so young and strong that she had hopes of her rallying when the fever left her."

"But she looks so!" moaned Mercy.

After a silence, during which the girls walked out to the piazza, Delight asked:

"Did Madame hear what she said?"

"Yes; Julia wanted her to hear. After all, Julia isn't so bad as we thought."

Delight did not reply. She had better judgment than Mercy, and was less governed

by her feelings. She was thinking that, but for this illness, Julia's conscience might not have been awakened, and Mercy would then have continued in disgrace.

That night Madame had a talk with the two girls,—a long talk which drew their young hearts still nearer to her. Just before they left her, she asked for the address of Mercy's guardian, and said she should write to him on the next day, explaining what had occurred, and that Mercy was reinstated in her standing at the school.

"And on the first day of next term I shall inform the whole school," she added.

"And Julia will be disgraced?" murmured Mercy.

"I must think only of justice at such a time," replied Madame, and she went on:

"If Julia lives, she will never come back here; her mother has told me that."

"Will she die?" asked Delight, seeing Mercy's moved face.

"The doctor says there is still a chance, and my own opinion is that now she has confessed this, she will be more likely to recover."

Mercy and Delight were to return by the ten o'clock train the next forenoon. As they stood on the piazza waiting for the carriage to come for them, Mercy pointed in an opposite direction, and asked:

"What is that? Some team from Lilliput?"

A pair of tiny South American ponies had just turned the corner toward the Institute. They were attached to a small phaeton, and they came on so rapidly that in a moment the occupant of the carriage could be seen more plainly. That he recognised them also was evident, for he took off his hat and swung it in the air. It was Sanxay Ranier, and, instead of being dressed in his grotesque white tunic, he had on an ordinary jacket, and his hair was no longer cut like a monk's. The fact that he had of late mingled more with boys and girls of his own age accounted for the change in his appearance. As he came near, it was observable that his face wore a look of health.

"This is good luck indeed!" he exclaimed, getting out of his little vehicle. "My mother sent me over to inquire about Miss Bowers, and to bring this," taking a basket of grapes

from the carriage. "I hope it's not impertinent to ask how you came here?"

In a few words Delight told him, for Mercy seemed loth to speak.

"I told you so," was his comment. "It will be good news for mother. Is that wagon coming for you?"

It was the wagon to take them to the station, and their good-byes were hurriedly made.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT CAME OF FISHING.

AS had been expected, the broken arm "knit" rapidly. Heartsease was about, but moving circumspectly.

It was hoped that the arm would heal before the boy broke his leg. Delight asserted that her brother's capabilities in that line were large.

The first promising cloudy day they started over the pasture to Archer's Pond, where Mr. Chantry kept a boat.

The two girls bore baskets filled with a most lavish lunch, for, as Delight had said, it would be impossible to carry too much food, as Heartsease was going.

Once embarked, Mercy immediately took entire charge of the oars, and rose immensely in the estimation of Heartsease, who was amazed at her skill. Delight, it is true, had

been taught like Mercy, on the Holden River, but she had never cared for the exercise as her friend had done.

"I declare, I will own that I didn't think you could do it!" exclaimed the boy, as the boat glided out from the shore.

"I am sure Mercy ought to be very proud," said his sister, who was often irritated by Henry's airs of superiority, while they simply amused Mercy.

"You just row out there near where the birches grow," directed Heartsease. "I have lots of luck there, and I wish you two wouldn't talk all the time, and scare the fish."

"But I thought only trout objected to noise," said Mercy.

Heartsease condescended to explain that all fish were decidedly "down on noise" of any kind.

They reached the spot he had indicated, and as soon as possible three poles were hanging over the water, and three hooks were dangling in it.

Five minutes passed, and not a word had been spoken. Then Mercy exclaimed, in a whisper:

"I shall die if I can't talk! I never had so many things that I wanted to say in my life!"

"Hush — sh — sh!" said Henry. "Whispering is worse than anything!"

"All the fish in the pond are not worth our sitting like dunces in this way!" retorted Mercy, giving her pole a twitch, and splashing the water about.

"This is the result of coming out with girls!" said Heartsease, angrily.

As he spoke, Delight swung her pole up, and lo! on the hook there dangled a large pickerel.

"This comes of being out with girls!" cried Mercy.

"Take off the fish yourself!" said Heartsease, sulkily. "I have only one hand, and if I had another I wouldn't use it."

"Of course I shall take him off myself," replied Delight, carefully drawing the fish toward her, "and you needn't lose your temper, bub."

She took the cold and wet fish in her left hand, and endeavoured to extract the hook from its mouth. As the hook came out, the fish writhed, and the fingers unclasped in-

stantly, whereupon the pickerel flopped over the side of the boat into the water.

"Oh, thunder!" cried the boy, unable to restrain himself. "You've taken him off with a vengeance! It's too bad, I say."

"We sha'n't get another one like that," said Mercy, ruefully, swinging up her pole to see if there were anything on the hook, and succeeded in giving it a twist that sent the hook into the skirt of her flannel dress, — sent it in securely, too, as only a fish-hook can go.

"I've caught a bigger fish than you," she said, not much blaming Heartsease for his angry face.

"I vow I won't come fishing again with a parcel of girls!" he said, furiously.

"'Nobody asked you, sir, she said,'" remarked Delight, who was frequently in the habit of becoming exasperatingly calm when her brother was very much disturbed.

"Heartsease, have you a knife?" asked Mercy, in despair, after having worked for several moments in silence with her fish-hook.

"Yes, in my pocket here; you take my pole, 'Light," and the boy pulled out his knife,

and handed it to Mercy, who deliberately cut out a small piece of the flannel which contained the hook, and then pulled the shreds away from the barbed points.

After this there was complete silence for a long time, during which the boy caught two pickerel of the very smallest size possible. Mercy took them off the hook, and, in obedidence to Heartsease, instantly flung them back into the pond again.

"It was when we talked that that big pickerel came to Delight's hook," said Mercy, at last; "let's talk more."

Heartsease groaned.

"You may just bear your trouble as best you can," said Mercy, rather sharply. "You've got us out here, and you've got to endure it!"

"Got you out here!" repeated Heartsease, in a high key. "Is that as near as a girl can tell the truth?"

"You just stop this talk," interrupted Delight. "I won't have you two fighting. Henry Hazelton, can you tell me what is that I see over there at the end of the pond? — on the shore near the tall poplar?"

"You don't see anything," was the gruff retort, and the boy would not turn his eyes in that direction. But Mercy looked and saw a small column of smoke ascending from near the water. She would have thought it was a fire for people who were camping out, but she saw no one near it.

"That's the best part of the shore," said Delight, continuing to gaze. "It's a lovely beach, smooth and white, and not half so many spiders and snakes as in other places. I meant that we should have our fire there."

"What were you going to cook?" crossly asked Heartsease.

"Pickerel, of course."

"First catch your fish," sententiously observed Mercy.

As she spoke the boy drew in his line, and a fair-sized fish swung from the end of it. The luck seemed now to have begun for all of them. In half an hour more they had caught fish enough to fry. They had not thought of looking again at the place where they had seen the smoke.

"It is certainly time for us to have our dinner," said Mercy, at last.

She glanced toward the end of the pond, and cried:

"Look there!"

The fire was no longer deserted. Bending near it was the figure of a woman; or at least the three thought it was a woman, while on the sand, a few yards from her, were four or five other figures, stretched at full length; whether they were men or women could not be told at this distance.

Still farther away, and tethered among the scrub-oaks, were several horses.

"I'm afraid!" announced Mercy, instantly.

Heartsease laughed with infinite scorn. He had not recovered his good temper, although the fish had bitten.

"You'd better stay at home," he said.

"I know what they are," said Delight. "They must be the Canadian gipsies. Tim Nolan was telling last night there was a camp of them over in East Ryan. They travelled in a big wagon, sold baskets, and traded horses, and stole, he said."

"And told fortunes?" asked Mercy, with interest.

"I suppose so."

"Then let's go up there. I've always meant to have my fortune told by a gipsy."

Mercy began to wind her line about her pole, and the others were willing enough to follow her example. The chance of seeing a real gipsy was not to be passed by.

Very soon Mercy was rowing rapidly toward the end of the lake, and they could distinguish more plainly the figures near the fire. One of the men rose and came to the edge of the water, looking at the approaching boat. A woman, accompanied by two little girls, appeared from somewhere in the vicinity of the horses. The children came down to the water and waded in barefoot, staring meanwhile at the oncoming boat, which soon grated on the sand of the shore.

It occurred to Delight that perhaps they ought to be timid about landing at an encampment of gipsies, but she did not feel so.

The woman who had last appeared on the scene advanced and took hold of the boat,

steadying it as the children alighted. She was so dark as to look almost like a mulatto, save that features and hair were very different. Her eyes were small and black as beads. Hands, face, and clothes were grimy to the utmost degree.

"Did you want baskets?" she asked.

"Do you tell fortunes?" inquired Mercy, while Heartsease snuffed at the contents of an iron kettle which, swung over the fire, emitted an odour of meat, cabbage, and onions, very attractive to the boy.

"I don't tell, but Mother Moreau will do it," was the answer.

"Is Mother Moreau here?" asked Mercy, who would not own to herself that the dirt was disgusting, still more the expression of low cunning on the faces near her.

The man who had been sauntering near the water turned and went in the direction of the wagon, whose dingy sail-cloth top could be seen among the green leaves.

"He's gone after her," said the woman, nodding her head toward the departing man.

The two girls stood waiting, and Delight said, in a whisper:

"What horrid things!"

Mercy assented silently. Neither would acknowledge that she was sorry she had come. Both wanted to turn and immediately reënter the boat, but neither would do it.

Soon there came from the neighbourhood of the wagon a tall woman, dressed in a red cotton gown, and wearing a scarlet handkerchief twisted about her head. Though her face was very wrinkled, and her black hair profusely streaked with gray, she was perfectly erect, and there was a kind of dignity in her carriage which impressed the two girls.

"*She* is something like," whispered Mercy. "She 'can past and future see.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

HEARTSEASE'S TEMPER.

THE woman came directly to the girls. Heartsease was already talking familiarly with the men, who had not thought it worth while to rise from their prone positions.

"You young ladies want your fortunes told?" she said, and there was a decided French accent in her tone.

Mercy put her hand in her pocket. Until this moment she had not thought whether she had any money. Her look fell.

"Have you any money?" she asked, quickly turning to Delight.

"No."

"I'm sorry," said Mercy; "but we have no money with us. We can't have our fortunes told to-day."

"Never mind," said Mother Moreau, smiling a little as she spoke. "I ought to be willing

to read your future, miss, for the sake of your black eyes. You might be a gipsy yourself. You have the look of one. It's a free, grand life, with hardly ever a roof above your head all summer long."

"If some of you will stop at Mr. Silas Chantry's," said Delight, "you shall have the money."

"I will stop, for money is always welcome," said the woman, "but I would have read your future for you without the silver."

She took Mercy's hand, but, instead of looking directly at it, she gazed a long time in the bright young face, and her own grew serious as she looked.

It was in vain that Mercy called herself silly; she could not prevent a chill feeling from creeping around her heart as she watched the dark old face before her, and she dreaded what was to be said. Was it really all a sham? — or could some natures read characters too mysterious to be comprehended by others?

"Clouds — heavy clouds," in a low voice began the gipsy.

Mercy had grown pale, but she kept her eyes fixed on the woman.

"You have to suffer much, and you can suffer far more than many others. Life is so strong, so deep in you! What heavy clouds! And they are all between your twentieth and twenty-fifth year. After that, if you live,— yes, I see bright sunshine for you then. But you will never marry, although you will love."

Mercy forced a smile at this. What were love and marriage to her now? Something so far ahead that she need never think of them.

"You do not look at my hand," said the girl, in a low voice. She was beginning to feel very gloomy and very sorry that she had come here. This was not any fun at all.

The gipsy woman seemed to make an effort, and withdrew her eyes from the lovely face at which she had been looking, examining with closeness the tanned little hand she held.

"She is 'making believe' now," thought Delight.

The woman went on glibly with the customary jargon in which the future is predicted.

She seemed to wish to efface from the minds of the girls the impression she had made.

"You will succeed in anything you undertake; you will always have friends. Even if you didn't have money, people would love you —"

"That is encouraging," interrupted Mercy. "But why do you think I am not poor?"

The woman smiled and said: "I know; I do not need to be told things; I can look through the veil."

"I wish you'd tell me then how long before I can use my arm."

It was Heartsease who spoke. His curiosity had made him stroll up and listen.

The fortune-teller took no notice of his question, and he immediately repeated it, insistently.

"She's not talking to you," said Delight, giving her brother a little push, which he resented to such a degree that he stepped in between Mercy and the gipsy, and cried out after the manner of boys when they are angry:

"You just let me be, 'Light! I guess I can speak to an old woman as well as you!"

Delight had sufficient caution to wish not to offend these people. Before she could speak the man who had gone to call the fortune-teller, and who had been standing not far away, suddenly made a stride forward, extended his hand, and took hold of the collar of Henry Hazelton's jacket, lifting him so that his feet and legs dangled and wriggled in the air. He was swung off several yards and set down on the ground, while Delight had sprung forward, crying:

"Don't hurt his arm!"

When the feet of Heartsease touched the ground, it was instantly perceived that he was in a very bad mood indeed. It was not pleasant to be lifted up in that way before two girls who had smiled at the sight. He had seen them smile.

He shook himself slightly, and turned furiously toward his sister.

"You hold your tongue!" he said.

The man laughed at the boy's fury, and then turned on his heel and walked away.

Heartsease had been cross ever since Delight had lost that pickerel, and he had now

come to the height of his ill-humour. He wanted so much to kick his sister that he turned and kicked into the air.

"I hate the whole thing!" he cried, loudly. "I hate it! I'm going home!"

"I have no objections," said Delight. "The sooner the better, I say. If father saw you he'd horsewhip you."

The two girls moved toward the boat. The gipsy looked at Heartsease and said:

"I can tell your fortune well enough. You'll die in state's prison or be hung."

The boy was beside himself now; his rage was like a madness. He stooped and picked up a stone, then hurled it at the old woman, who involuntarily lifted her hand as a shield. But the stone whizzed by the hand and hit her forehead, its rough edge cutting a gash, and setting the blood to flowing freely.

The two girls grew pale. The gipsy did not utter a sound, but she fell back against the trunk of a tree that stood near, and gradually sunk to the ground, still leaning against the tree.

No one looked at the boy, whose anger had

instantly subsided at the sight of the blood. The men who had been lying on the ground a short distance away all rose to their feet, and the man who had lifted Heartsease, and who had just strolled away, came back instantly, and for the space of a second there was a striking tableau.

CHAPTER XV.

AN OMELET WITH FINE HERBS.

"WILL you come home now?" asked Delight.

She had moved to where her brother stood, and put her hand on his shoulder as she spoke.

The woman who had been attending to the kettle over the fire hurried to the fortune-teller and began binding up her head.

As Delight stood by her brother, Mercy went to the old woman and asked gently if she were much hurt.

But she received no reply. The woman's eyes were closed, and she looked very pale.

"She is old; she can't bear such blows," said the other.

"We are very sorry; we shall send over to learn how she is," said Mercy.

While these remarks were being made near

the tree, a very different conversation was going on where Delight stood.

When she had asked Heartsease if he would go home, the man had put his hand decidedly on the boy's shoulder and said:

"No, he can't go home now."

Heartsease trembled, but he did not speak. He had lost all his bravado, and was now a very meek, not to say frightened, sort of a person.

"Can't go?" repeated Delight, growing yet paler.

"No."

"What do you mean?"

The very excess of her alarm made the girl speak sharply and boldly.

"I mean that you two young ladies must get into your boat and go home. We sha'n't let this little wretch go yet. I don't know but he has killed my mother. I'm going to keep him and see how much harm he has done."

Heartsease was very limp and very white. He caught hold of Delight's arm and whispered:

"You stay, too!"

"No," said the man, directly. "She can't stay; I won't have it. Go home; you ladies, go home, I tell you!"

What should she do? It seemed that she had no choice. It was useless to think she could stay.

"But how is my brother to get home?" she asked.

"I don't know," carelessly. "You've got to go this minute."

It was plainly of no use to continue this talk, and the gipsy evidently had decided so, too, for he walked to the water's edge and took hold of the boat, motioning imperatively for the girls to come.

Heartsease did not stir; he stood stiffly where he had been left, his eyes watching the group at the boat.

In another moment Mercy and Delight were afloat, their boat having been pushed vigorously off by the gipsy. The boy watched it go; his eyes were dry and distended; he felt as if life were over for him. He had no idea what was to be done with him. He wondered if the old woman would die. Then he

would be a murderer. Perhaps they would roast him alive; was it Indians or gipsies who did that? Or tie him to a tree and shoot arrows at him? But he was sure that it was Indians who did that last. His imagination ran dreadful riot in those few moments. Perhaps he would have a chance to run away. He could not do anything so well as if his arm were all right.

Of course Delight would tell her father, and of course somebody would come to the rescue. Then he remembered that his father had gone off in the first train that morning on business to Turner, a large town twenty miles away; he had been obliged to drive to Ryan to take the train, and he could not get home before nine in the evening; and there was no way to send word to him.

There was the regular hired man at home, or he would be at home by chore-time, but Ben, the boy said violently to himself, was a fool.

In truth Ben was rather stupid, and excessively slow.

A thousand thoughts were in his mind as

"'YOU DON'T GIVE US THE SLIP, YOUNG MAN.'"

he watched the boat going rapidly away, impelled by Mercy's oars.

Delight would do something; that was certain. But as she was only a girl, perhaps what she did would not amount to anything. He might have a chance to slip away unobserved. But this last notion was quickly dissipated, for the gipsy who had particular charge of him now came back from the shore, provided himself with a rope, and was soon carefully tying Heartsease to a tree.

"You don't give us the slip, young man," he said.

Heartsease did not speak until just as his captor was turning away; then he said, hurriedly:

"I've got five dollars laid up at home. I'll give it to you if you'll let me go."

The only answer was a derisive laugh; the man did not even look back.

Heartsease saw a woman helping the old fortune-teller to the wagon; and soon after that, the whole company gathered around the kettle which was lifted from the fire and set steaming in the midst of them.

They had spoons and wooden bowls or dishes, and they ate with immense appetites. In spite of his situation, Heartsease began to be hungry, but he told himself he would die before he would ask for any food. He remembered with anguish the well-stocked lunch-basket and the fish which were in the boat.

After awhile their eating was less vigorous, and they began to talk animatedly, but in a language the boy did not understand. The woman rose and carried a bowl of the stew toward the wagon. When she came back she filled another bowl and brought it to Heartsease, who took it gratefully, and devoured it with eagerness. When the bottom of the bowl was reached, he felt his courage much revived, and he began to lay plans. Of course the old woman would not die; perhaps she had not been as much hurt as he had thought; they had made the most of it, undoubtedly.

Meantime Mercy and Delight were rowing with all their might across the pond. It was a long while before either of them spoke. Finally Mercy said:

"I don't think the woman is hurt very much."

"I'm glad of that," responded Delight.

"And I don't believe she would have let them keep Heartsease if she had known about it."

"I guess they are all alike," was the despondent reply from Delight, "and it was very horrid of Henry. I hope he won't finish by getting himself into prison."

"What do you think they will do with him?" in an awestruck voice.

No reply from Delight, who was thinking too deeply to answer.

"What are *you* going to do about it?" persisted Mercy.

"Going to get some one to go there as soon as I can."

"You'll have to go to the neighbours, then, because your father is gone."

"Yes."

By this time Mercy saw that she could not make her companion talk.

They bent their whole strength to their oars, and soon they reached the shore, hurried out and pulled their craft up so it would not float

away, leaving lunch and fish forgotten. It would have been better if they had eaten something, for they were faint and exhausted when they reached the house.

On the porch they were met by Mrs. Pine, their nearest neighbour, who came forward with uplifted hand.

"Sh-sh-sh!" said she.

Now Mrs. Pine, although a kind-hearted woman, was a particular aversion of Delight's. She felt that she could hardly endure her now.

"What is the matter?" she asked, rather crossly.

"Your mother has one of her attacks," was the answer, with special emphasis on the last word. "So don't make any noise. I've just got on a mustard and given her some of the preparation. She wanted to see you the minute you came, and now I must go home and tend to my own work; but you may send for me if you want me."

Delight's heart sank within her, but she said, "Much obliged," and hurried into the house.

Her mother's "attacks" were characterised by violent pain, perhaps caused by neuralgia,

and great prostration for a day after. Delight knew she must not mention to her now this last adventure of Henry's.

Her mother lay on the bed, pale, with glittering eyes, and she was trying to suppress her moans.

"I'm glad you've come," she said to her daughter; "sit down here by me."

Delight put her hand on the burning forehead. For the next two hours she was entirely absorbed in taking care of the sufferer, whose illness was worse than Delight had ever known it. In that time the girl even forgot her brother, and Mercy was kept running, bringing hot flannels and hot water.

"How I wish father were here!" was the constant cry in Delight's mind.

The day, which had been two hours after noon when the two had reached the house, wore on until sunset, and then Mrs. Chantry's pain so far subsided that she fell asleep.

Delight came out into the kitchen, where Mercy was keeping up the fire. She sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands, breaking into low sobs. Now that the strain

upon her was removed, she felt like a child that must cry away its troubles.

Mercy came to her side.

"Is she worse?" she asked, in a whisper.

"Better," sobbed Delight, her shoulders beginning to heave more and more violently.

"Then don't cry," said Mercy, not very wisely.

"I've got to cry," said Delight, "or else go crazy with it all!"

"Then cry, by all means, — cry a barrel of tears," returned Mercy, whose spirits began to rise with ludicrous rapidity. "And I've a great mind to keep you company."

"No, don't!" exclaimed Delight, lifting her swollen face. "I hope one of us will keep her wits about her."

"It won't be me, then," said Mercy.

She whisked about suddenly, and opened the oven door, drawing out by means of the corner of her apron a dish which was carefully covered by a plate, and which emitted a curious odour.

"You haven't eaten a morsel since breakfast," she said, "and while you were in your mother's room I thought I'd make something rather nice for you when you had a moment. There!"

Curiosity as to what Mercy could have made, that was "rather nice," overcame for the time every other feeling in Delight's mind.

She bent over and sniffed, then drew suddenly back.

"What is it?" she asked, abruptly, and involuntarily raised her hand to her nose.

"Is there a disagreeable odour?" asked Mercy, with more dignity than usual.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings," began Delight, and then she interrupted herself to ask with uncontrollable curiosity, "What *is* it, anyway?"

"It is an omelet with fine herbs," replied Mercy. "They were always so good at Uncle Benedict's; and I asked the cook once how to make one; I always remembered the recipe."

"Did they look like this?"

"No; they didn't."

"If I were to describe the looks of this, I should use just one word," said Delight.

"What?"

"Diabolical."

"You needn't eat it," said Mercy, depressedly.

"Thank you."

Mercy took the dish carefully in her apron, and went and put it on the piazza.

"I think something *is* the matter with it," she said, as she returned. "Shall I bring out some bread and milk for both of us?"

When the two girls had satisfied their appetites, Mercy remarked:

"Perhaps I was not born to be a cook."

"What did you put in that omelet?" asked Delight.

"Milk and eggs, of course. But something happened to the milk when it began to cook. It grew watery and lumpy."

"Oh, it separated," said Delight. "That partly accounts for the smell."

"Separated?" repeated Mercy.

"Yes; soured, curdled."

"The milk seemed sweet when I took it from the pan."

"The heat soured it; you didn't get the right milk. Go on."

"I had doubts when it looked so odd, but I thought it would come out all right. I sprinkled in the herbs at the proper moment."

"Where did you get the herbs?"

"Out in the storeroom where I've seen your mother go; and she told me once that in the right-hand corner were hung the herbs for flavouring, and in the left-hand corner were the herbs for medicine. So I took some from the right hand."

"You have it just wrong. It's the right-hand corner which has the medicine herbs. Come and show me what you took."

They went into the storeroom.

"That is what I used, — and powdered it in my fingers."

She touched a bundle of broad, long leaves.

Delight stared aghast.

"That is skunk's cabbage," she said. "You made an omelet of eggs and sour milk and skunk's cabbage. Why not go to a cooking-school before you try again?"

CHAPTER XVI.

HEARTSEASE MISSING STILL.

HALF an hour before the girls had dared to expect him, Mr. Chantry drove into the yard. Delight hastened out and told the story of her brother's misdeeds and mishaps. Much to her relief, he did not seem alarmed.

"I hope it'll be a lesson to the young scamp," he said. "I'll go and get Mr. Long and his son to go with me. You jump in to show us just where to find the camp."

Then Delight explained that she could not leave her mother. After Mr. Chantry had been to assure himself that his wife was really better, he started out with Mercy for a guide to search for his son.

"He's always in a row," said young Long, after they had eagerly listened, as they drove, to Mercy's story of what she called the "abduction of Heartsease." "I never saw such a

boy. I s'pose he's never been stole by gipsies now before, has he? I'd like to know what's the next thing on his books."

The young man said he knew the place after Mercy had described how they had approached it in the boat. He knew when to leave the public road, and what cart-path to take.

They soon came to the spot. The stars shone clearly enough for them to discern that no one was there.

Mercy was out of the carriage with the rest.

"They have gone!" she cried.

Mr. Chantry said, "Impossible!" and began to be really alarmed.

Mercy pushed her foot among the ashes of the fire, and brought into sight some live coals. There was no question but that this was the place.

They all groped about for a few moments, Mr. Chantry keeping very silent. How could they get on the track in the night? And it would be very hard to wait until morning.

"There are but two ways for them to go after they reach the main road," said Mr.

Chantry, "and as they came down from the north it is likely they went on south, toward Blakeborough. Such a company would be sure to be noticed. We will inquire."

Once out on the main highway, and Mr. Long went to the first house on the north while the rest drove toward the south. But absolutely nothing was to be learned. It did not seem advisable to pursue the search until daylight, and the party returned in silence.

"Don't tell your mother," said Mr. Chantry, as Delight again met him in the yard. "We shall find him to-morrow."

Then the two girls went dejectedly into the house.

The next morning Delight was up very early to make her father a cup of coffee before he started afresh on his search. With the new day Mr. Chantry's hope was great.

"I shall find them encamped within ten miles of here, near Blakeborough," he said.

As Mr. Chantry hurriedly ate his breakfast, Mercy came into the kitchen.

"Do let me go with you," she said. "I want to see Heartsease when he's found."

"All right, then," said a voice; "you just look around and see him."

The voice came from the open door. Mr. Chantry rose quickly from the table, and the two girls uttered an exclamation.

There stood Henry Hazelton, very red and very dusty, and trying to conceal that he was rather hysterical.

His father seized him by the hand and drew him into the room. He was so glad, for the moment, that he forgot to be angry.

"Where did you come from?" he asked.

"From Blakeborough."

"Did you walk all the way?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lucky your arm is nearly well. How did you get away?"

"The old woman set me loose."

"The woman whom you hit?"

"Yes, sir."

"How is she?"

"Don't know. Her face is swelled up and horrid."

Mr. Chantry's gratitude was fast giving place now to indignation against his son.

"You didn't deserve to get off so easily," he said, sternly. "The woman must have been uncommonly kind, or she wouldn't have let you go."

Heartsease stood looking down at his bare feet. He was hungry and thirsty, having been on the road long before it was really light; and he had run a good part of the way, so eager had he been to get home.

"I want you to give her ten dollars," he said, suddenly, speaking very loudly and desperately, and flashing his eyes up for an instant at his father's face.

"Oh, did you promise her that?"

"Yes, I did."

"And that is why she let you go, eh?"

"No, it isn't, either. She came to where they had tied me to a tree, early this morning. You see they left that camp by midnight, almost. They said they often went in the night in hot weather."

Here was plainly to be seen a little air of pride in the superior knowledge his adventure had given him.

"I don't care when they travel," said

Mr. Chantry, sharply. "Go on with your story."

"Well," in a more subdued way, "she came, with her head bound up, and untied the rope. She said she was sure I knew the way home; and that she didn't let me go because she liked me — "

"I should think not!" interjected Mr. Chantry. "Precious little reason she had for liking you!"

"But for the sake of the young lady with the dark eyes."

Here the boy glared markedly at Mercy, who blushed with astonishment, and some other feeling she could not define.

"The young lady with the dark eyes!" repeated Mr. Chantry, and he laughed as he added, "This is really growing romantic, Mercy."

"You are making that story up, Heartsease," cried the girl. "The gipsy never said that."

"But she did, though," said Heartsease, boldly, "just those words, and I was so kind of glad to get away that I promised her ten dollars, and I'm to carry it to her before next

Wednesday, on the east side of Blakeborough, about half a mile from the town. Will you lend it to me, father?"

"How will you pay me?"

"I shall pick berries, and do whatever I can."

"Very well. I shall hold you to the payment of every cent."

Mr. Chantry rose and went out of the house, and Heartsease instantly sat down in the chair his father had vacated.

"Guy! but I'm hungry!" he said. "'Light, give me some beans, and some coffee; reach me some of that corn-cake, will you, and that cold ham?"

"Won't you have something else?" anxiously inquired Mercy, as Delight poured the coffee, and hastened to put the different plates of food near him.

"Not just now," was the reply.

After a few minutes, which he employed to the utmost, the boy said, looking at Mercy:

"If it hadn't been for you, it wouldn't have happened."

"What!" she cried, indignantly. "Did I make you throw that nasty stone?"

"But you wanted to land and have your fortune told," he said, triumphantly.

"Don't be a fool!" said Delight. "If you are going back like that, why, if we hadn't gone fishing, we shouldn't have seen the gipsies. You can't hide behind a girl's back, Henry, and I'd be ashamed to try."

This touched him; he turned red, and muttered something to the effect that he wasn't doing any such thing.

It was some hours later that Mercy, who had seen Heartsease go to the barn, sauntered there herself. She found him watching the astonishing gyrations of a six weeks old calf.

"I want to give you that ten dollars, Heartsease," she said.

"No, you won't," he replied.

"It will take you an age to earn it," she remarked, taking her place beside him, with back against the barn and eyes fixed on the calf.

"No matter if it does," was the dogged reply.

"How are you going to do it, anyway?" she inquired.

"Mostly berries."

"Pshaw!"

The boy made no response. He watched the calf more intently than before.

"And you can't use both hands," she continued, after a time.

"I can in a week or two more, before huckleberries are thickest."

"Then the price will be down."

"Can't help that."

"I think you are a very silly boy. You know really I did want to land and see the gipsies," said Mercy, "so in a way it was my fault."

"That's all bosh," said Heartsease, suddenly stooping and picking up a stone to fire over the calf's head.

"But you said so yourself," she remarked.

"Then I was a poor stick. Of course I didn't mean it."

"But you'll take the ten dollars, Henry, won't you?" turning to him in a coaxing way.

"I won't, then!" flatly.

"For I have an awful lot of money. That ten dollars wouldn't affect me any."

Which was not strictly true. Although Mercy was the owner of what, in a sense, was a lot of money, her allowance of pocket-money was not very large, and ten dollars would make a vast difference in it.

"Mighty jolly for you, then!" said Heartsease, with unction.

"And you'll take it?"

"No, sir-ee!"

"Then I know what I'll do, in spite of you!" triumphantly.

"What?"

"Help pick the berries."

"But that won't be fair."

"I can't help that; I'm going to do it; and I say let's begin to-day. They were twelve cents a quart down at the village day before yesterday, and they'll grow cheaper every day. I'm going now. You might come with me, and get what you can."

He could not resist this arrangement, and the two were soon on their way to the Rocky Pasture, each bearing a pail which was to hold "low blues."

CHAPTER XVII.

LOW BLUES.

DELIGHT could not go, for she had a good deal of extra work to do on account of her mother's illness. Mrs. Chantry was better; the pain had not returned, but she was still very weak; by the next day she would probably be down-stairs.

Heartsease and Mercy found a place where the berries were thicker than they had expected, and they were soon entirely absorbed in their work.

After a while Heartsease stopped in his slow and laborious picking with one hand, and looked into a thicket of scrub-oak with such an expression of anxiety that Mercy looked also.

"Did you hear a rustling?" he asked.

She had not heard it, and was inclined to believe that he had not, either.

"I s'pose you're going to tell me that a tiger from a circus is loose in these fields," she said.

"I'd as lief 'twould be a tiger," returned the boy, mysteriously.

He went on picking again, but he kept glancing at the clump of oaks. At last he started up hurriedly.

"Let's come away from here!" he cried.

"But we haven't got more than half the berries," said Mercy, who still believed he was arranging some joke, and who was not going to fall a victim to it.

"Hang the berries!" he cried. "It's that tarnal old cow that's worse'n any tiger! She has tossed no end of children! I thought they didn't let her out in this pasture nowadays!"

He was standing upright; his pail was on the ground, and he was looking, with hand shading his eyes, into the thicket.

Mercy was well endowed with physical courage, so she was not easily alarmed. She had never heard anything about this ill-tempered and dangerous cow; and she did not quite believe in it.

But the next instant both of them became plainly aware of a sharp cry, coming apparently from the other side of the oaks. It was a cry of alarm and distress, something which neither of those who heard it could run away from unheeded.

Forgetting themselves, they both dashed away from among the bushes and in among the oaks.

The cry was not repeated, but a voice was heard shouting:

"Go away! Go along!"

Even then, Mercy fancied there was something familiar in that tone, but she could not tell what it was.

The next moment both the children had emerged from the oaks, and both involuntarily paused an instant, for, directly in front of them stood a large brindled cow with sharp, long horns. She was furiously shaking her head, but her head was away from them, and, plainly, she did not see them. Her whole attention was directed toward a small figure which was standing near a huge oak, evidently preparing to dodge around it, if necessary.

That figure, in the midst of her astonishment, Mercy knew well.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, without an instant's thought of what the result might be, Mercy snatched off her large-brimmed hat, with its flying scarlet ribbons, and ran forward, flourishing it in the face of the cow, having an idea that the animal would turn and run away.

Heartsease groaned aloud.

"Doesn't she know any better?" he cried.

But it was too late to stop her. The cow turned and shook her head at the hat and ribbons. Mercy saw the flame of her vicious eyes. If she had not been as excited as she was, she would have been afraid.

"Run! Clear out!" now shouted the boy by the oak-tree, addressing not the cow, but the girl, who did not even hear him.

The next instant the cow started toward Mercy, snorting, and looking as if she would tear up the very ground before her. The girl had absorbed the cow's attention entirely, and the consequence was that she had to turn and run with all her might. She was running

slightly down-hill, among rocks, huckleberry and sweet fern bushes, and she flew on, feeling as if her feet hardly touched the ground, but hearing the hoofs behind her, and wishing she could literally fly.

Heartsease absolutely danced up and down in the height of his excitement. He did not notice in the least the individual who had been the unwitting cause of this dangerous predicament. He ran down a few rods, then stopped, put his hand to his mouth, and shouted:

"The gap in the wall! Make for the gap! To the left! The gap!"

Did she hear him? If she did not she would have no chance whatever, he thought, to escape before the cow could reach her. And she was not sufficiently familiar with the pasture to know of that gap.

But she did hear, for she swerved immediately to the left, and the boy near Heartsease cried out, with intense gratitude:

"She heard you! She will get away!"

Yes, she did get away. Panting, with heavy heart-beats all through her body, Mercy

reached the gap in the wall, and squeezed through it, then sank on the grass of the "mowing," and lay there well-nigh breathless, hearing the cow marching up and down the other side of the wall.

"We'd just better cut stick as soon as we can," said Heartsease, turning to his unknown companion.

"Just my notion precisely. There's no telling when that creature may come back, and there's no other girl near to save us."

"Guy! that's so! It makes a feller feel kind of mean to owe so much to the girls," remarked Heartsease, as the two went as rapidly as possible toward a fence at the right.

"Oh, I'm used to that," said the other.

"We'll climb that fence, and skirt along till we come to the field where Mercy is."

Nothing more was said until the two boys had reached the other side of the fence. Then they both looked earnestly down toward the place in the wall, near which Mercy must be.

"I hope she hasn't broken any bones," said Heartsease, who naturally thought of bones.

Then he turned to the stranger and said, more gently than he usually spoke:

"Do you mind my going on faster? I want to see if anything is the matter."

"Go on; I'll come as fast as I can," was the answer.

Sanxay Ranier, for, reader, as the novels say, you already know it was he, toiled on as well as he could. But before he reached the place he had the pleasure of seeing Mercy stand up on the other side of the wall and wave her hand at him, to which he responded by flinging up his hat.

"I'm going to lay a deep plot by which I can save you from something dreadful, Miss Mercy," said Sanxay, when he had shaken hands with the girl. "I'm most awfully tired of this one-sided kind of business. I don't want you to rescue me from anything again. I'm not going to be grateful. If you see a tiger devouring me, I warn you not to disturb him."

"I won't promise," said Mercy, gaily.

"I never saw anything so idiotic as it was

for you to shake your hat in that way," said Henry Hazelton, severely. "What did you think you were going to do?"

"Frighten the cow, of course."

"Just like a girl!" he cried out.

The dwarf turned upon him, savagely.

"You just hold your tongue, my young friend!" he said. "It doesn't look well for you or me to criticise."

"Yes; but the idea of her thinking *that* would frighten a cow!" persisted the boy.

Mercy was not in the mood to have much patience with Heartsease. Besides, she didn't know just how he would treat Sanxay, whose appearance seemed miraculous simply because it was unexpected.

She learned that he and his mother were visiting a friend near Ryan, and that he had been driving out with his ponies, had been beguiled into picking berries by the roadside, and had strolled farther and farther into the pasture.

"What do you say," he concluded, with animation, "to our all going back to the phaeton, and I'll take you home?"

"And our quart of low blues which we have left over there?" questioned Mercy.

"Must be left as a reward of merit to the cow," said Sanxay.

Nobody dared to go for them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PRESENT.

DELIGHT CHANTRY had been washing dishes and milk-pans until her soul was tried within her.

But the last pan had been turned over on the wood-pile in the sun, and she had washed and rinsed the two dish-towels and was spreading them also on the wood-pile, when a distant, but very distinct, "Whoop! Hurrah!" made her look down the road.

A pair of ponies had just turned the corner, and were coming on rapidly, kicking up a cloud of dust; but in the dust, beneath the phaeton canopy, Delight was sure she saw the figure of her brother waving his hat in a much glorified manner.

Delight ran out to the fence, forgetting how tired she was.

"Those must be Sanxay Ranier's ponies; but how came they here?"

In another moment they had dashed up, and Heartsease jumped out, volubly narrating everything that had happened.

Sanxay was invited in to have a drink of cool milk, and for a time there was a great chattering and laughing. Only, Mercy could not help moaning over her lost berries.

"Instead of being thankful she hadn't a broken neck," as Delight remarked. And then she added, in her sensible way, that it was just possible the berries might be recovered. They would go for them when the cow had been driven home, after supper.

They did so, and behold, Mercy's pail of berries stood safely where she had left it, but the cow had stepped squarely into the other pail, crushed the berries, and burst out the bottom of the pail. Heartsease shut his teeth hard when he saw this destruction, and he was hardly grateful that the animal had chosen the smaller quantity to destroy.

That night, when Mr. Chantry came from the post-office, he brought a letter to Mercy from

Madame Delmont. It announced that Julia Bowers had been improving for the last three or four days, and that she was now considered out of danger. Her mother would remain with her until she was able to be moved, when mother and daughter would go home. Madame Delmont, relieved from anxiety concerning her pupil, was going to leave the following day.

The note ended with a cordial wish that nothing might prevent the two girls from returning to Holden Institute at the close of vacation.

But how long those vacation days still seemed!

It was on one of these that Heartsease searched for the gipsies to pay the money he had promised.

The girls were sitting on the stoop paring and cutting apples when the youth turned the corner of the house on his return. He would not answer a question until he had eaten a great many doughnuts. Then he graciously signified he would speak.

"Did you find them?" asked Delight.

He nodded.

"How is the fortune-teller?"

"Well 'nough. There was an all-fired fuss about that stone, I think."

"Did she say anything?"

"Well — yes — she said — something." Heartsease hesitated and seemed a little confused.

"What?" came from both the girls.

"She said that I was a gentleman," blurted the boy.

"Oh! oh!" in chorus from his listeners.

"Because you threw that stone?" asked Delight.

"Because I kept my word." He looked at Mercy and added, "She wouldn't take that money for telling your fortune. You know you told me to pay her that when I went."

"Why wouldn't she take it?"

"She wouldn't tell. She's a queer one. She said she had decided not to. And so here it is."

He took out of his trousers pocket and put in Mercy's lap a shining half-dollar. She wanted to tell him to keep it toward the ten

dollars he was to pay his father, but she was not sure but he might resent it if she did so.

"She's a very odd fortune-teller," she remarked.

"Awfully strange thing for one to refuse money. I'm afraid that blow on the head has confused her mind," said Delight.

"Bosh! She's bright enough," answered the boy.

At last, when everything had been talked over, Heartsease looked at Mercy and announced:

"I brought home something for you — a present."

"For me? What made you hold it back so long?" asked the girl, with some irritation.

"You provoking boy," cried Delight, giving him a push, "not to tell before!"

Yielding to that impetus, Heartsease went into the yard where the wagon had been left, and drew something in a newspaper from under the seat. He went back in the kitchen, carrying the package carefully, and as if it were very heavy. He deposited it on the floor at Mercy's feet.

"There it is. Don't ask me to lift it again with my one arm."

Mercy stooped, preparing to take something of great weight, and exclaimed as she found the parcel so light.

The wrapping was quickly off. The present was a beautiful work-basket, with compartments, all made of scarlet and white willow.

"Where is *my* basket?" asked Delight, turning on her brother.

"Ain't any for you."

Delight clasped her hands.

"None for me!" she cried out at the top of her low-toned voice. Then she suddenly went down to her deepest notes, and repeated, "None for me?" flinging out her hands furiously. "Let the gipsies be accursed! — accur-r-rsed! *accurs-ed!*"

"Delight!"

The voice came from the sitting-room, and her mother now stood at the door, her face at first alarmed, but changing to an amused look as soon as she saw the group.

"I didn't know," she said, "but it might be some — some hyena."

"It's only me, mother," replied Delight, ungrammatically. "Look at this basket. A work-basket for Mercy, and she hardly knows how to thread her needle, much less to set a stitch."

"I must learn. I must make everything I wear," announced Mercy.

"Do; and I guess you won't have quite so many flounces and streamers," said Delight.

"Do you object to my flounces and streamers, miss?" swiftly turning on her friend, who shrank back, eagerly exclaiming:

"No! no! I love 'em; every one!"

"Very well, then. Mrs. Chantry," looking at that lady, who was examining the basket, "I really can't sew, and I wish this basket had been of some other kind. If it had been something beside a gipsy who had sent it to me, I should give it to Delight."

"Indeed, no," protested her friend. For a moment Mercy was looking rather grave. She was thinking, as she sometimes did, of the sombre future which the gipsy had appeared to see for her.

"What is this?" asked Mrs. Chantry. She

drew from one of the little compartments a bit of paper folded closely, and handed it to Mercy. The girls felt this to be very interesting, and their hearts beat faster as Mercy unrolled the paper, which was evidently a scrap torn from the margin of a newspaper. There was writing in pencil upon it, — not so much like characters in script as in laboriously printed letters.

Mercy's face was pale as she deciphered the words, and read them aloud. But they were not as vague as prophecies usually are. She read:

"A great danger waits for the girl with the gipsy eyes. I seem to see the peril here in this country. Let her go to her home within a week and she will escape it."

"Guy!"

This exclamation came with great force from Henry Hazelton. He had no more imagination than a practical, active boy usually has, and this to him was only something to laugh at.

"She's gone it steep this time, hasn't she? She's an old cat!"

"She's been kind enough to you!" retorted Delight, who could not bring herself at once to speak lightly. "You be quiet!"

Heartsease was silent.

Mercy continued looking at the scrawl in her hand. Mrs. Chantry's face grew severe.

"It is wicked to play upon one's feelings in this way," she said, indignantly. "We know very well that such words are mere folly, utterly without reason. She can't make such a prophecy as that, unless they intend to compass some danger for you themselves, which is unlikely in these days. I suppose they are not brigands!"

"They won't do anything. They are off before this," said Heartsease, surprised to hear his mother speak so emphatically on the subject. "They were packing up when I was there."

"I don't suppose, in the least, they will do anything," responded Mrs. Chantry. "But I have no patience with any such stuff as that."

She put her hand on Mercy's shoulder, as she continued:

"I hope you will forget those silly words."

"I will try to forget them."

"And you are not going away from here until vacation is over," said Delight.

"Not I — if I can help it."

But Mercy did not speak with her usual animation. She folded the paper and rose, saying she should put it in her pocketbook, which was in her room.

She went up-stairs, and Delight went on cutting apples.

She finished her task, and Mercy had not come down.

Mrs. Chantry could hardly express herself severely enough concerning such fortune-telling.

Delight went to her room, which was Mercy's also. She found her friend standing by the open window, and looking absently into the branches of a cherry-tree which grew near. Mercy did not stir as her companion came up and put her arm about her.

"Mother says it is a shame for a girl with any sensitiveness, any imagination, to have such a thing said to her!" exclaimed Delight, vehemently.

Mercy leaned against her friend, and in a voice not quite steady, she said:

"Sometimes I long so for my mother!" When she had spoken she turned and threw herself into Delight's arms, who held her fast, while she sobbed heavily.

At last Delight began to whisper soothing and loving words, and Mercy gradually became calmer.

There was no cloud on the brilliant, dark little face the next day when she and her friend, with Heartsease, climbed into Sanxay Ranier's phaeton, and they all drove off to a distant berry pasture. The black huckleberries were beginning to come now, and the day of low blues was passing.

"Warranted to contain no animal that would harm the smallest child," said Sanxay, as he gathered up the lines.

"What are you talking about?" asked Heartsease.

"The pasture."

The whole party went to work in the berry field in good earnest.

After a season of silence and labour, a hand

put aside the thick branches of a young pine, and Delight said:

"I was told that no animal was in this pasture — or I wouldn't have come."

"What now?" asked the dwarf, coming forward.

He joined the two girls, and they pointed toward the slope of a hill a short distance away, where, among the sweet fern, moved a large, tawny animal, snuffing about as if to discover the scent of something.

"I didn't think he'd find me," said Sanxay, looking eagerly at the creature. "Just watch and see what he'll do when he sees me."

What the creature did was to come with great leaps over and through the bushes until he reached Sanxay's side, and stood there gazing into his small master's face, and wagging his tail violently, — a magnificent St. Bernard dog of the largest kind.

Of course the young folks fell in love with him on the spot, and greatly scolded Sanxay for not having brought him before.

"A cousin of mine has been keeping him for the last six months," said Sanxay, "but I

wouldn't do without him any longer. The foolish thing absolutely loves me."

There was something in the dwarf's tone which made it difficult to answer him. After a silence he spoke again.

"It's a lovely sort of a world, after all. But sometimes I think I have no place in it, and that it would be just as well if I were out of it. It doesn't make a fellow happy to go around in this shape."

The girls longed to say something comforting, — but what could it be that should soothe him?

"I suppose my mother would care," he went on, as if speaking to himself. "I think mothers can't help loving their children."

A cold nose touched his hand. The St. Bernard asked for attention.

"And Tiny Tim is actually attached to me," he said, with an odd smile.

The enormous dog had been named Tiny Tim.

Sanxay now looked at Delight, and remarked:

"You didn't know I was such a sentimental

lout, did you? Well, I'm not going to die. I'm going to live to be a horrid little old man."

"You are a wicked boy," said Delight, earnestly.

"Do you think so?" he asked.

"Yes, I do. It is a shame for a boy whom everybody likes to talk like that."

"But everybody doesn't like me."

"We speak for ourselves, then," said Mercy. "We like you."

Even the skeptical little dwarf could not doubt the sweet sincerity of that voice, nor the soft shining of those eyes.

"Really?" he said. "That is good. I believe you do. You don't know how glad I am. You two have always treated me as if I were just like anybody. I've never seen in your face what a horrid atom I am —"

"Stop!" said Delight, authoritatively.

"I will stop. I don't know what mood took possession of me. I never talk so except to my mother."

He rose and walked away to where Heartsease was at work.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DRY TIME.

IT was hot, suffocatingly hot. There had been no rain for weeks. A smoky haze hung over everything. The sun rose coppery and dull every morning. The gardens where the farmers had toiled were drooping and dying. Even those brooks which did not usually fail in a dry time failed now, or there was only a poor little stream in the bottom of the course.

The wells of many of the neighbours had given out. The cattle, instead of getting water at their usual places, came down the lane lowing mournfully every noon, and water had to be carried to them.

Reports of forest fires in distant parts of the country kept coming to the ears of the people.

"I hope the Walton woods won't get on fire," said Delight, one day.

"Why the Walton woods particularly?" asked Mercy.

"Because they are so large, and there are a dozen or more houses in them. I don't believe a fire there would ever stop, with everything as dry as tinder."

"It's a horrible time," said Mercy, shuddering. "I never felt so gloomy in my life. If it doesn't rain soon we shall all die. Mr. Long's well is dry now, Heartsease said, and your father must go for water down to Mr. Martin's."

"I'm so tired of this smoky smell in the air," exclaimed Delight, putting down a book she had been trying to read. "And I can't take a long breath," throwing back her head.

Heartsease came around the corner of the house fanning himself with his straw hat. He was in his usual costume of checked shirt and overalls with one suspender.

"Have you seen that smoke?" he asked, pointing over his shoulder.

"We haven't seen anything but smoke for a good many days," was the answer.

Mercy walked to the end of the house and looked in the direction where Heartsease had pointed. A thick and wide column of smoke was pouring up into the murky sky; there was little or no wind, and the smoke would remain for some time almost stationary, till, as more rose, a part of the pillar would slowly dissipate and waver off, adding to the thickness and gloom of the heavens.

Mercy was interested, but not startled, for she had seen signs of many forest fires within the last two weeks.

"Come here," she said to Delight, who languidly rose and came forward. She turned quickly toward Heartsease and asked:

"Has father seen that?"

"Don't know; he's off in the ten-acre lot with the oxen."

Delight looked excited, and Mercy, glancing at her, began to feel excited also. How close and choking it was! How brassy and relentless were the sky and sun!

"I think that is the Walton woods," ex-

claimed Delight, "and father said everybody must go and fight the fire, if they caught, or there would be houses and lives lost."

"Yes; I guess that's where that fire is," said Heartsease, in a manner unwontedly subdued.

As he spoke, there was the sound of horses' hoofs and of hurrying wheels. A rickety hay-rigging, with half a score of men standing in it, some of them bearing long-handled shovels, rattled down the hill and into sight.

The pair of rapidly trotting horses dashed on, and then were suddenly drawn up in front of the house, while one of the men called out, looking at Delight, who had stepped forward:

"Where's your father?"

She told him.

"Can't one of you run over and tell him the Walton woods are on fire? If a south wind comes up, I don't know why the whole country won't be burned over."

Before Delight could say that she would go, a voice from down the road yelled:

"Hullo there, Henry! Come and drive these oxen home! I can't wait for them."

It was Mr. Chantry, and he strode on quickly,

leaving the team behind him. He ran into the barn, and came out with a shovel in his hand.

The oxen were trudging on several rods away, and Heartsease had not started.

"Father, father," he shouted, trotting along by Mr. Chantry's side, "let me go with you! 'Light will put the oxen in the barn."

"No; I can't have you on my mind," was the answer. Mr. Chantry jumped into the hay-cart, and it rattled on. Heartsease slowly went down the road, and conducted the oxen home.

"I call it mean!" he repeated to himself a great many times.

But he was not more thrilled by the sudden excitement than were the two girls.

"Can't we go?" asked Mercy, turning her shining eyes on her companion. Delight shook her head.

"I wish we could," she answered, "but I don't see how. We can't walk, and I know mother wouldn't let us drive either of the horses. Girls always have to stay at home!"

"How awful if a south wind should rise!" exclaimed Mercy. "Think of the fire sweep-

ing right down over those woods back of the pasture there!"

"See! The blaze!" shouted Heartsease, who, having hurried from the barn, was standing on a fence, imagining he could see better.

A sheet of yellow flame flickered up for a moment in the density of the smoke. The children could almost fancy they heard the rush of fire in the tall trees. Then the smoke grew blacker than ever.

Several moments passed, during which the fluctuating of the smoke was watched in silence, save for the boy's ejaculations.

Then was heard the sound of wheels again; this time it was the wheels of Sanxay Ranier's phaeton, and his ponies were driven into the yard by their owner.

"I want you all to come up to Park's Hill with me," he said. "I have just been over there, and the fire is magnificent from the brow of the hill."

Delight ran into the house to ask her mother's permission, which was given, and then the crowded little phaeton went back again the way it had come.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LAST.

IT was very nearly sunset by the time the party reached the top of Park's Hill, which was about three miles from Delight's home. It was a very bad road which led to the hill, and the ponies must walk the whole distance.

On the way they could look across the wooded valley to the Walton woods, and as night came on the lurid scene grew every moment more terrible and grand.

"I should have come for you before," said Sanxay, at last stopping his ponies on the summit, "only I thought if it were evening it would be so much grander."

"It is like a monster," said Delight, standing up in the phaeton, from which the canopy had been taken off.

She had that feeling which fire so often

gives one; as if it were conscious and alive, and seeking knowingly what it might devour.

Mercy was so awed and subdued that she did not speak. She stood and gazed with wide eyes. She had never seen anything in the least like this before.

"We will go down a couple of miles nearer," said Sanxay, at the end of half an hour. "We shall never have another chance at such a sight."

No one objected, and the ponies trotted slowly on. It was too hot for them to go fast, and the air was so thick with smoke that the lungs laboured heavily for life.

"It is like fighting for one's breath," said Mercy, who was more affected than the others. Even Sanxay seemed to breathe more easily than Mercy.

Behind them panted the huge bulk of Tiny Tim.

"He begged so hard to come that I couldn't say no," said his master, "although I explained to him how uncomfortable he would be."

By this time they could distinctly feel the heat from the fire; and they could hear the

rending and crackling of huge tree limbs, and the shouts of men, as they worked on the borders of the fire, trying to prevent its spreading. Another turn, and they could see in the glare the figures of the men. Some of them had large branches of pine with which they beat at the fire; others with the long shovels quickly flung sand and earth, and thus smothered the flame which seemed to creep and elude, and spring up again a few yards away.

Although there were many men, and they worked like giants, they only partially held the terrible power in check; but they did gain some victory over it, and they worked and hoped for more. A few of them secretly and despairingly prayed for rain, thinking they had seen in the sky that morning unfailing signs of showers before midnight.

"Let us walk nearer the fire," said Mercy, at last.

Delight remonstrated, but Mercy and Heartsease wished to go, and they did, while Sanxay and Delight sat in the carriage and watched them slowly making their way, fascinated more and more with every step they took.

"I suppose there is no danger," said Delight, somewhat uneasily.

"Not a bit," said Sanxay, positively. "How can there be?"

Neither knew of one peculiarity of forest fires in such a drought; that they would seem to leap over an intervening space, and suddenly burst out in a new locality. It appeared as if the wood or bushes were so dry that they burst into spontaneous flame, indeed there is a theory to that effect; but perhaps here the different fires were kindled by unnoticed sparks dropping among dry leaves.

Certainly now Heartsease and Mercy were not near enough to cause the least reasonable anxiety. They stood within a few yards of each other, gazing intently.

Suddenly Sanxay, who was more sensitive to any atmospheric change than most people, began to climb out of the phaeton.

The glare of light revealed some unwonted expression on his face.

"What is it?" asked Delight, quickly, leaning far out of the carriage.

"I think there's a south wind rising. I am going to call to them."

"But let me go!" and Delight was going to jump out.

"Stay with the ponies," he called back. "I'm only going to mount that fence. I have my dog whistle with me; and they couldn't hear a voice."

His view of the matter was apparently right, and Delight sank back on the seat. Even as she saw Sanxay on the fence, and heard his shrill whistle above the sound of the fire, a roar came over the burning woods and over the unburned forest on each side. The trees bent and lashed, the flames ran and licked forward for rods; a shout came from the men; like figures, dim and sooty, in Hades, they fled backward. The dreaded south wind had come, had come in a gale that was a fiend to help the fire.

Delight saw the dwarf on the fence; she saw Mercy and Heartsease turn to fly back. She saw a sweeping brand come down out of the air, striking Mercy on her head; she saw the girl drop to the hot ground, while Heartsease, who was ahead and did not see, came

dashing on toward Sanxay. The dwarf, however, *had* seen, and, jumping from the fence, went as fast as possible toward the spot where Mercy lay, the yellow shape of the St. Bernard after him.

All this happened in a few seconds of time; and Delight, half stupefied, was stepping on to the low step, and had not noticed that the gust of wind had made the ponies uneasy, when she was thrown back on the seat, and the ponies, now thoroughly frightened by all they had seen and heard, started off at a run.

Delight lurched forward for the reins, which had been hung over the dash-board. She grasped them, but not until the animals had gone a mile could she have any success in stopping them.

Thus with an agony of fear in her heart for those she loved, the girl was obliged to ride away from them.

It seemed so long to her before she was able to turn the ponies back, and then, after a quarter of a mile, they absolutely refused to take another step; they were afraid to go back. Delight, had nothing been at stake, would

have been too frightened to return. The south wind roared a gale, and to that sound there was added the rush of the flames, the sound of falling limbs, the whole terrible noise of fire.

Delight left the ponies in the middle of the road, and ran as fast as she could up the hill. But her feet were weighted. It was like running and struggling as one runs and struggles in a nightmare.

She had not noticed, and probably no one there had seen the heavy black cloud approaching, beaten by the wind, but coming up for all that, like a giant that will have its way. But who in that smoky blackness could have observed, had eyes been at liberty, anything save the flames before them?

Terror-stricken, Delight saw how the flames had made headway while she had been gone.

Half a dozen men were hurrying forward to the fence over which her friends and her brother had climbed.

She saw her father's figure, and he had some burden in his arms. Was it Heartsease? No, for he was running by his father's

side. The man striding behind also bore a burden, a lighter one evidently, and beside him walked Tiny Tim.

Just as they came to the fence the fire reached out, and two tall trees close to them sprang into flames. The heat was well-nigh intolerable; it seemed as if they could not find strength to take down the fence bars, — as if the fire must kill them.

Delight sprang forward, and then stood cowering, as she heard her father's voice cry, hoarsely:

"Keep back!"

One of the men in the rear sank down on the scorching ground, unable to move farther, although knowing that to fall was to die.

Suddenly two or three great rain-drops fell splashing, and the next instant sheets of water poured down hissing upon the burning woods. The rain fell in torrents; it seemed but a breath of time before there was no perceptible sign of fire. The men could breathe again. The man who had fallen rose feebly to his feet, revived.

Delight now pressed forward unreproved. She could not see anything, however, but she

knew that her father had brought Mercy in his arms.

"What is it?" she asked, so close to her father's side that, in the deafening noise of wind and rain, he heard her.

"Mercy was hurt," he answered, and she did not ask any more.

In five minutes the clouds parted a little, and the wind began to subside. It rained more moderately.

"I think I can stand now," said a voice from Mr. Chantry's shoulder.

"Thank God for that!" was his fervent exclamation.

The next moment Mercy was leaning heavily in Delight's arms. She had been injured by that blow from the flying brand, and came near dying of suffocation afterward. But the dash of rain in her face had revived her.

"Where is Sanxay?" she asked, quickly, and shuddering as she spoke. "He and his dog tried to pull me away before the men came. I knew it; I tried to tell him to go away; but my breath came so hard!"—and she panted as she spoke

It was very dark now in contrast to the vivid glow of the fire. But it was growing lighter, as the clouds broke and eyes became accustomed to the obscurity.

The man who held the small form of the dwarf was kneeling on one knee. The girls heard him say:

"His heart beats; but I guess it's about over with him."

"Something must be done!" cried Delight, springing forward, and leaving Mercy to cling to the post of the fence. "He shall not die!"

Mr. Long had gone already to bring around one of the teams that had fetched some of the men to the fire.

"We must wait here until he comes," said Mr. Chantry.

The dog sat down close to his master.

Neither of the girls ever forgot that half hour of waiting in the dripping rain and the smoke-filled darkness.

When the cart came, they took Sanxay and the girls to the nearest house, a mile away, and some one rode off for the doctor.

After a stimulant had been given to Sanxay he opened his eyes.

"It's no use," he murmured. "Where's my mother? She will care."

Then he lay silent for several moments. Without opening his eyes he said:

"Tim must be Mercy's dog."

Hearing his name, Tiny Tim put his nose against his master's hand.

"Mercy's dog," repeated Sanxay.

Mercy stood a little distance from the lounge on which Sanxay was lying. Both her hands were pressed against her heart, which she felt would burst.

Delight was by her, her face colourless, her eyes wide and full of suffering.

The boy moved restlessly a few moments; cried "Mother!" in a voice of entreaty, and then was still.

"It is all over with him," said Mr. Chantry, after bending down over the little form. "I will go to his mother; God help her!"

"It was because he tried to help me," said Mercy, speaking for the first time an hour later, when the two girls were at Delight's

home. And they both cried as if their hearts were breaking.

It was in the latter part of the next week that they were to go back to the Institute. On the day before, a man drove into the yard. He was in an express wagon, and a big dog was chained in the back of the vehicle.

"Mrs. Ranier said I was to deliver this animal to Miss Mercy Anthony at Mr. Chantry's," he said, "and this letter."

The St. Bernard came gravely toward Mercy and stood by her side, as if he understood that, henceforward, that was his place.

It was some time after the man had driven away before Mercy had power to open the letter. It was only a few lines.

"My dear son wished you to have Tiny Tim. I know you will love him and care for him. Sanxay always loved you, and I, also, was drawn to you. Perhaps, if you are not too happy in the home of your guardian, you will spend, hereafter, much of your time with me, although I am a lonely and sorrowful woman. If you do not object, I will try to make some such arrangement."

Mercy kissed the letter with trembling lips. Not to have to consider Uncle Benedict's as

her only home! To think of that lovely woman who had been so kind to her as really her friend!

Then she looked down at the dog, knelt by his side, flung her arms around his neck, and wept until his yellow hair was wet.

"Do you think the fire was what the gipsy meant, in her prediction?" asked Delight, as they were in the cars riding toward Holden Mountain Institute.

Mercy shuddered.

"But it was odd, wasn't it?" continued Delight. "It just happened so."

After that, they tried to talk of their studies for the term about to begin, but their minds would go back to their vacation.

Tiny Tim was in the baggage-car. On the arrival of the girls at the Institute special arrangements were made with Madame Delmont for his comfort; he had his kennel in a back yard, and always accompanied Mercy and Delight on every walk and excursion where he could possibly be present.

THE END.

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